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# THE GIFT OF THE GRASS

JOHN TROTWOOD MOORE

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## **THE GIFT OF THE GRASS**



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“O Jack, Jack, darling—save me!”

# THE GIFT OF THE GRASS

*BEING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A  
FAMOUS RACING HORSE*

BY

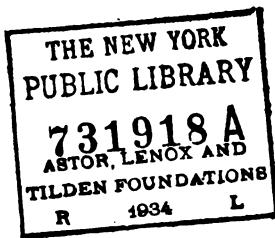
JOHN TROTWOOD MOORE

X

*Author of "A Summer Hymnal," "Songs and Stories from Tennessee,"  
"The Bishop of Cottontown," etc.*

ILLUSTRATED BY G. PATRICK NELSON

BOSTON  
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY  
1911



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LONDON  
1911

## PREFACE

I CANNOT call this book fiction; there is much of it that is fact. There are many who will recognize the leading incidents of this story as the real happenings to a race horse, — one who, from obscurity and an humble birth, became the greatest of the land. The story of his family — once unknown, but now the greatest of their breed — is told herein: the hardships of his early life, the disdain of his master, the starvation and mistreatment, his misfortunes and trials, and, withal, his triumphs and the glory of his great race.

Great horses are like great men: they achieve greatness because greatness is born in them. And if ever of an unconquered mortal these lines might be said, truly of this horse are they applicable:

"Out of the night that covers me,  
    Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
    For my unconquerable soul."

And so I dedicate this book to four of them that I knew and loved — all of a family, and all unbeaten champions of their day. They were gentlemen without knowing it, friends without pay, generals unbooked, and heroes without feathers or trappings:

Little Brown Jug, 2:11 $\frac{1}{4}$ ; Hal Pointer, 2:04 $\frac{1}{2}$ ; Brown Hal, 2:12 $\frac{1}{2}$ , and Star Pointer, 1:59 $\frac{1}{4}$ , — immortal quartet of the unbeaten Hals.

JOHN TROTWOOD MOORE.

NASHVILLE, TENN.,  
October 15, 1910.

1934

AUG

LAWRENCE FRITH,



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# THE GIFT OF THE GRASS

## INTRODUCTION

I AM almost afraid to tell people how beautiful the world is down here, for fear they will not believe me. If I had lived in the age of the Aryan fire-worshippers, or the Chaldean star-worshippers, or the Greek and Roman wind-and-sun-and-star-and-hero-worshippers, I am quite sure I should not have worshipped any of these things; but in ignorance of the true God, I think I should have knelt down and worshipped the grass, for grass is nearer to God than any of the sweet things of nature He has made.

The sun is too bright and fierce, and the stars too far off, and the wind and clouds uncertain and intangible. But grass is with us — here — and it soothes the strained and overworked eye and rests the heart and brain, and being evergreen and good, it proclaims itself a type of immortality. It is so simple and yet so beautiful.

There are only two things in the world done by man which hurt me as much as to see little children sacrificed to suffering: one is to see some one plough up a field of blue grass, and the other is the wanton cutting down of a tree by the human hog, who fails to plant a younger tree in its stead.

I hate the man who does these profligate things; for beside seeing in him a scourge of his own land and breed, the trees, to me, are endowed with personalities — with souls! Some are bright and joyous and love to live and

## The Gift of the Grass

would consort with their kind; while others are sad and thoughtful, and take life hard.

And the grass — it is a myriad army of little green people, who always love to live and do good.

Oh, we have just begun to live in this world! We are yet in our skins of humanness — a lot of misfit links — thick-headed, evil-tempered, selfish apes — who think we know it all and that we are great and wise and are living as God intended we should!

But only if we could look ahead and see what the true race is going to be a million years hence! To them we will have been less than cave-men, cliff-dwellers. For they will have gone to heights indeed, over hills of progress.

And do you know what I believe will be the dominant characteristic, the ruling spirit of the perfect man? The recognition of life and immortality wherever he sees it, whether in tree, grass, bird, animal, or man. All things will be alive to him and he will respect every little life which lives, and knowing that he himself is immortal and that they also are, even unto the gift of the life given them, he will respect the rights of life in those things which we men-apes now wantonly and ignorantly slay.

And he will love all things which the Great First Cause, whom we call God, has made. He will lie down with the grass, and kiss the flowers as children, and be unto the trees an elder brother. And as for taking human life, the thought will have been bred out of him eons ago!

I would not live in a country where the blue grass does not grow. I associate it with the idea of divine good-will — that God has sent it as a special sign of his favor and esteem, and that those unfortunate lands where it does not grow are, while blest with other things, to him, as compared with the blue grass country, as a kind of Esau and not a Jacob.

## Introduction

And so I hate to see it ploughed up; and when I see the cold steel going through its shimmering sod, and turning the long, dank furrows up where heaven's own carpet lay before, I feel as if myriads of my little friends were being buried — friends whom I knew and loved.

Ay, and another reason why I love it is that intuitive knowledge that tells me, when I see it in the abundant, deep valleys, changing to brighter tints on a thousand hill-sides, that there will I see the race-horse in the glory of his caste and the pride of his achievements; there will I find the gracious Jersey, the splendid shorthorn, the clean-legged and black-faced among the sheep, the swine, rotund and bred not for nought.

It is the banner of the live-stock brigade; the soul of speed; the color of the pure-hued butter, the Ariel spirit that rollicks in the contented cud of the shorthorn.

I would love to live upon it always, but since I cannot, I should rather wish at last to sleep beneath it, than under some pile of clammy stones which will one day topple over to mark the spot where I am forgotten.

There is pagan yet in us — our ancestors drank of it too long and deep. Involuntarily we ascribe life — even gender — to the things around us. The rules of our dry grammars might better be changed to teach our children gentleness and perpetuate the pagan idea that things strong should be masculine and those weak and dependent, feminine.

This would place the blue grass where in my dreams it has ever been, — the Juliet of the grasses.

The first up in the morning of the spring, full-grown before her colder-blooded sisters are out of their short frocks, she is a thing of impassioned fruition, voluptuous loveliness, and romance. In love with herself and nature, she wanders by the early April brooks and rejoices in the

## The Gift of the Grass

first song of the meadow lark. A true philanthropist, she feeds from her bountiful apron the early lambs and she slips a few blades into the mimicking mouth of the new-born colt. A thrifty housewife, she begins at once to put her rooms to rights, and in a few days her floors are covered. Her walled hillsides she decorates with her favorite color, even the bare panels between the rocks. And she passes always in and out among the flocks and herds, their comforter and loving shepherdess. Her stoutly built Quaker sisters — the Timothys — come along apace, attend to their own business, and, barred off by fence and wall, vanish under the mower and the hay-rake. That prolific wench, the Red Clover, flaunts out later, like the cook in her Sunday clothes, bedecked with many ribbons and smelling of rank perfume, raises her yellow and brown brood and goes into winter quarters. Those old Scotch maids, the Orchard Grasses, come along after a while, suspicious and wary, unsociable and full of whims, only satisfied when off in knots and clans by themselves. But they are afraid of the cold, and the first cool wave from the north sends them after their winter flannels and they also vanish. In sharp contrast to them are the Red Tops, a lot of pretty flirts who flaunt their red petticoats in the face of decent people till arrested by the mower's blade and raked in for safe keeping. Even the Crimson Clovers rise up in serried ranks, lift their bloody spears to heaven, fight their battles and pass away.

And little Juliet, she, too, blooms and for a while is meek, and methinks she will go the way of the others. Shorn of her locks, demure and quiet, she pines under the hot sun. Nothing but her blue blood sustains her. But "Death's pale flag is not advanced there," for with the gentle rains of the fall comes again her beauty. Her pulse beats to the whirr of the quail, the chuckle of the black-

## Introduction

birds, and the flight of the wild goose. The lambs, grown now, come in again for part of her care, as do also the eager cattle and the stately racers.

And so, like Spring's dream, resurrected in the bosom of Winter, she makes glorious the death of the year, sings the swan song of Autumn and hangs her garments of evergreen on the very Snow King's brow. Nor will she sleep, save under the snow, to wake again in the spring, a blessing, a poem, and a picture.

## CHAPTER I

### I FIND MYSELF IN A DITCH

WHEN I found myself I was on my back, wedged in between a rough stone fence and the side of a ditch. It was hot, and the sun burned me dreadfully, making me pant for breath, my mouth open and my tongue like a chip. Worst of all, I could move nothing but my legs, and they felt wobbly — wobbly and numb — just like when your foot 's asleep. By turning my head a little and rolling my eyes I could see where I was, — a sloping, grassy hill on one side stretching away for miles and miles, and a stone fence on the other stretching away for miles and miles, and up above me I could just see the tops of big oaks and poplar trees, and I guessed they stretched for miles and miles. But my mother told me afterward that what a little colt, just born, thought was miles and miles, was only a corner of a lot, back of a country home. She said everything looked big to colts just born.

I could see the top of a house among the trees, but the sun was so hot to me, not being used to it, and I had such a begging, hurting feeling in my stomach, and my tongue was so hot and dry and tickling for milk, that I could n't notice very much. Then I heard a great buzzing and I forgot everything in fear of it. It was caused by great blue-green vultures (my mother afterwards told me they were flies), and they came sailing around and playing buzzy, sleepy tunes and watching me out of their great, gleaming blue eyes. I was afraid of them and shivered;

## I find Myself in a Ditch

and yet every time they'd light on the grass-trees high above me and play their buzzy, buzzy tunes with their blue wings and the little fiddle sticks on their legs, to save my life I could n't help it — I'd just go to sleep again! Then one would light on me and I'd wake with a start and a terrible scare, and I'd kick and try to struggle up, only to pant and fall back.

I felt as if I were dying. I could see the big vulture-flies sitting around on the grass-trees way up above me or on the crags and precipice-rocks that jutted out way up in the sky, and they'd wink their big ugly eyes at each other and grin out of their wide mouths, and then blow such funny, sleepy tunes through their slender cornet pieces that seemed glued to their noses.

And every time they'd blow them I'd go to sleep, although I was scared dreadfully. I knew they wanted to put me to sleep and then eat me, but I could n't help it; to sleep I would go every time they would *buzz, buzz*. Then I'd get mad at them and struggle and kick at them, and the ones nearest me would get out of the way quick enough, and then such a buzzing laugh would come from the whole flock as if it were a big joke!

Then they would all sit off a little farther and buzz and wait.

By and by I heard the ground playing telegraph — for the ground is a big telegraph to horses that stay on it always — even sleeping on it — and it is easy for us to hear what it taps out to us. *Tip-tap, tip-tap*, it sounded, so plain — for my ears were right down on it — and then *thump-thump, thump-thump!* And I knew two persons were coming — one barefooted and walking light, and the other in heavy walking shoes was walking *thump-thump*. Then I heard voices, and by twisting my head a little I could just see over the ditch two men talking. One was

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a red, sorrel-faced white man, with a star and a snip on his nose and both feet shod in black shoes; and the other was a bald-faced, well-roached black man with wall eyes, looking mighty worried and scared.

He had brown feet and he was n't shod.

They were examining closely the slope of the blue-green hill above me, and the white man was very angry at the black one, and he asked quick and stern-like:

“Where is Lizzie, Jim?”

“In the barn, Marse Nettles — I put her up in her stall at sun-up and give her a feed of grain.”

“At sun-up?” He looked at his watch. “And here it is ten o'clock. Don't you see,” he went on, pointing to the grass, “that there was a colt foaled here last night? Where is the colt?”

“She did n't have no colt with her, Marse Nettles,” said the black man, his eyes looking bigger than ever. “'Deed she did n't! I took her to the barn — I did n't see no colt.”

The white man fairly snorted out: “I did n't know you were such a fool, Jim; I thought you had more horse sense. Here, let 's look for that colt — it 's wandered off. I 'll bet it has fallen over the bluff into the creek yonder. If it has, you imp of darkness, you 'll pay for it out of your part of the crop!”

I kicked and tried to make a noise, but I was too weak. I could see Jim, going on a run toward the creek, and the white man, walking around and looking at the grass. Then Jim came back, shaking his head, his eyes whiter than ever.

“Look here,” said the white man, “that colt was foaled here last night. It 's dead now, of course, all through your thick head. Say — why did n't I think of it before — run quick and turn out Lizzie! She 'll find it for us.”

## I find Myself in a Ditch

The ground began to telegraph me quick taps again as Jim ran toward the barn. Then it stopped, but soon began to telegraph me a message that just thrilled me — gliding taps that came in one running wave through the grass and a quick, mad, screaming neigh, that came with it through the air, and a sweet mother smell with it. I knew it was my mother, though I had never seen her. I knew the smell.

Oh, how my heart beat and how I panted and tried to get up!

“I’m coming, son, I’m coming!” it said, and the first thing I knew a big brown face, with ears laid back and nostrils quivering and eyes blazing with hysterical madness, was right over me, neighing thunder screams of anger in my ears and pawing at the sides of the ditch and kicking out quick-like behind, and switching around her long, beautiful black tail. And the two faces, black and red, looked over the side of the ditch.

“Pull him out, Jim — he’s alive yet!”

But Jim was already down in the ditch and had me in his arms. Oh, how good it felt to lie somewhere else than in the ditch on my back! He climbed up, bringing me to my mother, and I licked out my tongue at the smell of her and the good breakfast I saw streaming out and running down her hocks. She came toward me, whimpering softly and sniffing the air cautiously. Nearer yet, and then she gave me one sniff and I saw sparks of yellow light shoot into her eyes, her ears fly back and glue to her neck, and then she gave one scream of angry disappointment, wheeled, darted off, stopped, kicked, and pawed the ground, her eyes blazing mad.

My head sank in shame. I was sorry they had taken me out of the ditch.

“Cur’pony — cur’pony,” said Jim gently, going to

## The Gift of the Grass

ward her and holding me out invitingly in his arms. "Here, Lizzie," he said, ever so softly, "this is yo' baby. Here — I did n't know he had come — I would n't 'a' tuck you away — here, Lizzie."

But she only looked at me quick again and fled, neighing and screaming.

"Here, you ole fool!" cried Jim, "don't you know yo' own chile? Do you think it 's a bear, or a billy goat, or a mule, I 'm tryin' to put off on you?"

But she only ran off farther.

"Put him down," said the white man coming up; and he looked me over carefully. "No," he said, with cold quickness after a while, "no — he 's not a bear, nor a goat, nor a mule — he 's uglier than all of 'em put together." Then his face flushed red as fire coals: "Breed-ing to a scrub pacer! I told the Squire he 'd get it — a little dish-faced, cat-hammed, ewe-necked, tow-headed, crooked-hocked, spindle-shanked scrub —" he was so disgusted he could n't finish all the harrowing, hair-raising names he had for me.

But these were enough, and I hung my head. I wanted to go back in the ditch and die, for I had heard my mother screaming and talking in her horse way, and while they could not understand her, I understood it all, too plainly.

"Yes — yes —" she screamed, "he 's all that and he is n't mine — it ain't my smell! My colt, last night, was beautiful and my smell was on him. But this thing smells — O Bok, our good horse-god, Bok!" And she ran off farther.

Jim kept rubbing my head and patting it and saying, "You po' little devil — but you sho' is ugly."

"Put him down," said the white man, "put him down, and see if he can stand up — the scrubby little peg-legged, pastern-twisted, knee-banging, narrow-chested —" I

## I find Myself in a Ditch

don't know what else he said, for I went down in the grass limp and wobbly. Jim stood me up again, straightening out my legs, but when he took his arms away my legs just gave way under me again and down I went.

"Like a roll of stuffed sausage," said the white man bitterly, "and stuffed with yellow dog at that," while my mother said with offended dignity:

*"Sausage? Sausage? You know my colt was not sausage!"* and she tossed her head and ran farther.

The white man felt my front legs and then my hocks down to my pasterns. He ran his palm under my throat and down my chin, turning up my head and looking at the size of it. Then he got up quickly:

"Weak in the tendons, down in the loins — bullet-headed and no brains! Go throw him back into the ditch and see that it is deep enough to hold him. He's a disgrace to old Lizzie."

And my poor mother screamed: "He is — he is! But he ain't mine, I tell you — he carries not my smell! O Bok — Bok!"

The white man started off. "I'll leave the job to you, Jim; kill him — I must be going. Kill him before the Squire sees him."

Then he walked off fast, and I saw him mount a big horse that I heard mother call Finger Tail; and Finger Tail fox-trotted off, switching his tail and nodding his head solemnly.

As he passed my mother I heard him say: "Don't let them kill him, Lizzie, I was just as unpromising when I was born — now look at me!" and he attempted to canter, but only crow-hopped, switching his tail and stumping his front toes.

For this the white man jerked his mouth savagely and cursed him good, digging his heels into Finger Tail's flanks,

## The Gift of the Grass

who tried to go faster, but was so stiff in the hind legs that he only danced up behind and came down in the same place.

I was on the ground, all heart sick, and wishing Jim would make haste and put me out of my trouble, for death could n't be worse than to be born with a stomach and have nothing to put in it, and a mother who disowned you and a master who would kill you.

I rolled up my eyes sadly and I saw Jim scratching his head and looking down at me. Then he sat down on the grass beside me and felt my tendons.

“Huh — huh!” I heard him laugh, “he’s all right — he jes’ needs a breakfus’. Mr. Nettles, he say, kill him, but I don’t — no, not Jim Welch. An’ I’ll bet Marse John don’t say so if he’s sober. The Lord sent him here, an’ He sent him here for somethin’. Mr. Nettles he’s cu’is an’ mean. Lord, I wish he did n’t boss Marse John lak he do.”

I was very grateful to Jim for this and began to feel stronger. Then he got up and went to the barn, and very soon I saw him coming, with a halter in his hand. He walked up to my mother, still snorting and pacing restlessly around, and she quieted down at his touch, whinnying softly to him as if apologizing for her rudeness and beseeching his pity. Over her head Jim slipped the halter and led her near me, tying her to a limb. I wondered what it all meant, for he came again and picked me up, smiling knowingly.

“Be game, little Hal,” he said, and then he laughed. “Yes, that’s yo’ name, jes’ little Hal, — be game, fo’ yo’ folks is all game. Stan’ up now an’ make a fight fo’ yo’ life.”

I nodded and wobbled, and when he helped I struggled up, standing, but swaying and nodding dizzily and feeling monstrous queer.

## I find Myself in a Ditch

"Good," said Jim; "ha — ha!" and he pushed me a little.

Horrors! I started over on my head, but just then I threw out one of my forelegs to catch myself, then the other to balance myself, then my hindlegs to balance them, and, oh, I was so tickled I had to laugh with Jim!

"Ha — ha — ho — ho!" he roared. "Walking! O-ho! No 'count is he? Down in the lines?" And he slapped his thigh with his hand.

But having started, I went wobbling on, for I could see my mother just ahead, and I had a gnawing pain in me that needed the sweet milk, which I could see and smell, running to waste and falling down her hocks. Oh, I did want it so! And on I went, my nose stuck straight out, feeling proud of myself and of her. But just as I reached her my mother turned with blazing eyes and —

I was on the grass again, ten feet off, with the breath knocked out of me.

I shut my eyes and tried to die. I heard Jim talking dreadful to my mother: "Ain't you 'shamed to kick him over? If you ain't killed him it 's a wonder!"

I heard my mother prancing back, snorting, rearing, and trying to break away.

"Po' little Hal," said Jim, coming up; "well, if she ain't killed you it 's a wonder!"

I felt so grateful at this that I struggled up, shaking my head. For I 'd learned how to get up now, and though I staggered a bit till I caught my breath, I stood up so determined and game that Jim slapped his thigh, laughing loud.

Then I saw him scratching his head again in deep thought; and then his eyes began to shine and he cackled out gleefully:

## The Gift of the Grass

"I sees — I sees now! I shet her up so long she los' the smell — but I 'll fix you, ole lady."

He went up to my mother gently, rubbing her nose, and again she talked low to him, begging his pity.

"Don't you know yo' own baby, Lizzie?" he asked, all the time petting her and edging around toward her flank. "I shet you up — it was n't his fault."

And petting her and talking he kept on around to where I saw my breakfast still leaking out. Then very gently he put his hand underneath and caught a handful of the creamy milk and came to me, laughing and winking, as he rubbed it over my nose and face. How good it smelled! He laughed again when I poked out my tongue, licking his hand.

He went back again, milking out another handful. This he mops over my neck and down my back.

Then with a pat he pulled the halter off my mother.

"Hi-yi! We 'll see — we 'll see, ole lady! An' whose colt is it now?"

I stood, expecting to see my mother start off, but instead she turned her head toward me slowly, snuffing the air. All the yellow anger and fight had gone out of her eyes; she stood sniffing and stretching her neck, and I started wobbling toward her. She backed her ears, but reached out, smelling my face, my neck, my back. Then the soft nozzle licked me in the face, while I just had heart enough to whinny, "*Mother — mother!*"

And with big tears running down her eyes she answered back: "*My beautiful one — it is he — it is the smell!*"

I wiggled my tail and nudged in for breakfast.

Oh, how good it was!

## CHAPTER II

### **MILLY MAY**

MY mother was proud of me, — I could see that, — although I was so ugly; and after I had my breakfast I felt so strong that I wiggled my tail and ambled once around her just to show her what I could do. She appeared not to notice me, but I could see that she was monstrous proud.

“Hal, Hal,” she whinnied softly; “and Jim says you are a prince. Well, Prince let it be, since Jim named you, and he did enough this morning to stand godfather. Come along — you want to sleep now.” And she led me off to where some big trees were in the corner of the lot.

“My little boy — and I could n’t smell it was you! Well, ugly is that ugly does.”

I slept long, for I was tired and sore. But every time I cracked one eye between naps I could see my mother standing guard over me and I felt safe. Presently I was awakened by hearing her snort, and seeing her dart out, her ears laid back, her teeth shining. I raised up startled and scared. A meddlesome old gray mule was running for life and mother was after her, flying in that long, gliding, terribly swift pace she had. I heard her teeth snap like a wolf-trap in the gray mule’s flank and then a whining, begging:

“Oh, Cousin Lizzie — Cousin Lizzie — don’t! I just wanted to see — who — who — it looked like — who was its daddy, you know!”

“Don’t *cousin* me,” said my mother, as she shook her

## The Gift of the Grass

good and turned her loose; "and you attend to your own business. He looks very much like his sire, you may be sure of that."

The mule was very glad to get off, stopping on the side of the lot at a safe distance to make a face at us and bray a most insulting epithet at my mother.

"That," said my mother, coming back, "is Gray Lize, a *kiotycut* (which is from the wolf language, and means a sneaking cut-throat); and if she had caught you alone, she would likely have pawed the life out of you, as she did a little colt last spring. She has, of course, no pedigree on her sire's side, and because her dam was a half thoroughbred mare, she is always bragging about her breeding, and is even presumptuous enough to claim kin with me; for my sire was John Netherland by Henry Hal, and my dam was Blackie by John Hal, all common pacers," she said sadly, "and I am sorry to say many of them were really kin to mules. But my dam's mother, Old March, was by Young Conqueror, a thoroughbred son of the great thoroughbred, Lafayette," she went on proudly, "and that 's where our good blood comes in."

Then mother told me pacers were very common; people called them scrubs and side-wheelers, and their name among horses was *hip-paca*, — that she herself, despite all her efforts, could do nothing but pace, although she had good thoroughbred blood in her.

"And if I could only fox-trot or single-foot," she went on to say, "I 'd have been a fine saddle mare and been taken to the fairs and heard the music and seen the admiring crowds applaud while the judges tied the blue ribbon on me for the best saddle mare. But I can do nothing but pace — it is terribly strong in me. We must do what our heredity makes us do, Hal; but I am determined you shall not pace and shall be a fine saddle horse

## Milly May

and take blue ribbons at the fair. Never, son, — never as long as you live, — strike the gait of the common pacer. Oh, if you were only a trotter — like Billy Boy! For trotters are something, Hal, — something, and they go to races at fairs and fetch high prices. Of course, we can fly pacing, Hal, but what's the use of being born with wings in a barn loft?"

She shook her head: "It can't be — we are just common pacers, but I shall try hard to raise you right and make you a fine saddle horse."

I saw my mother was very vain and ambitious, and that she had a biting tongue when she said:

"Mules — observe, my son, the shorter the pedigree the longer the ears."

She said much more, but I was sleepy and dozed off. I was sleeping soundly when the ground began to send me little muffled telegrams — they did not ring clearly, but came in a gliding way. In an instant I was awake, throwing up my head. I screamed, for a large yellow dog that my mother called Sheepkiller had slipped up behind and squatted, eyeing me with wicked, malicious eyes, as if ready to spring upon me. There was a snort of answers to my call from my mother, who was some rods away, talking to a big bay mare, and then she came at the dog like a whirlwind.

He ran, yelping; but my mother, in that terrible striding pace, which seemed fairly to eat up the distance and swept the air by me like a storm, overtook him in his flight, his face turned back and snarling wickedly at her. In an instant her teeth sank into his shoulders, and she had him in the air shaking him as if he had been a rat. With a last vigorous shake she tossed him over the fence, where he came down, limp and bleeding on a lime rock boulder, and ran off barking and yelping.

## The Gift of the Grass

The big bay mare was named Trotting Kate, and she also ran up, stopping near me, while my mother came back laughing, and the two walked off, Kate scarcely noticing me.

But from Kate's side there trotted up to me the most splendid colt alive. He was three times as large as I, with graceful, beautiful neck and head, and a white star in his forehead. He was so haughty and proud and had so many fine airs that I felt very insignificant myself. He stopped at a distance, and seeing my shame he began to laugh and make comic mouths at me.

"Scrub!" he sniffed, "side-wheeler! No wonder Sheep-killer took you for a sheep."

"Please tell me your name," I said, "you are so handsome."

"I," he said, arching up, "am the son of Harold, sir, and my name is Hambletonian Junior, sir—registered and all right," which I thought was a dreadful big name for a colt to have, but he looked it, he was so handsome and proud.

"What's yours," he sniffed, "or did any one ever think of naming you? There's dog-fennel," he said, with a sweep of his tail, "that grows all over the lot, but it's all just dog-fennel," and he laughed.

"But I *am* named," I said proudly. "I am little Prince Hal."

"Little Prince Hal!" and he sat down limp and pretending to fall, as one does when one drops dead in a race. "O Bok—Bok, who could have been so soulless as to perpetrate such a joke on a newly born billy-goat? Prince Hal! *P-r-i-n-c-e* Hal," he drawled satirically. "Why, I have seen no king meandering around here without any halter on, and if that old brown mare is a queen—O Bok!" and again he pretended to drop dead.

## Milly May

I wished very much to be his friend, and ambled up to him, whereupon he wheeled, tripped me up with a funny kick and sent me sprawling on the grass, while he kicked up his heels, laughed, and trotted beautifully off.

I lay where I fell and went to sleep again, for I had learned even in my short life that when worried, tired, and in doubt it was best to go to sleep. Somehow the sweet blue grass, whether I ate it or slept upon it, seemed to fill me with hope and life.

And the last thing I remembered was wishing that I, too, were a son of Harold, and might be registered and all right, instead of being a poor little pacer, whom dogs mistook for sheep.

The ambition of my mother began to burn in me. After a while I heard some one talking to my mother.

"No — no," he said, "he may be a great horse yet — you can't tell what a no-count colt will grow into. Look at me — I was just as ugly."

Then he walked off switching his tail and crow-hopping gayly.

"That's Finger Tail, Hal," said my mother, "a good soul, and what the Great White Men call a fool friend; but we horses call them *hippo-butters*, because by butting in they do their friends more harm than good. He is a half thoroughbred and is very proud of his stringy tail, because he has learned it is a sign of thoroughbred blood. You will observe as you grow up, my son, that good breeding covers a multitude of family failings. But come," she said, "Finger Tail is back, and that means Mr. Nettles is here, and that means we must keep out of his sight. Get up and take more refreshment."

Which I took.

I had just finished when I heard him, loud voiced and angry, talking to Jim. "Did n't I tell you to kill that

## The Gift of the Grass

ugly thing? Look at his impudence — up and sucking,” and he cursed me cruelly, and, in trying to walk, reeled as if leg tired.

Jim laughed. “I did try to, but — but — I could n’t ketch him.”

“Could n’t catch him! Don’t lie to me — you had him — he could n’t walk. Here, Squire,” he said, calling to Master, “look at the thing. I told Jim to kill it!”

Jim laughed funnyly. “Boss,” he said to Master, the Fat Red Man, who came up eyeing me, disappointedly, “ha — ha — he — he! I leaves dat colt dere an’ goes off to git de axe to kill him as Mr. Nettles said, but ole Lizzie heerd whut he said, an’ when I gits back she had ‘dopted dat colt, nu’sed him and *a-w-a-y* dey both flies! No, sah, you cain’t nachelly ketch ‘im. Dat colt’s a pacer.”

Master looked at me closely: “Well, Nettles, he is about the sorriest one I ever saw. I hate to kill him — did you notice that pace? — but maybe you are right — yes, maybe so. Still, I hate —” I saw Master was easy, and that Mr. Nettles had him.

I was very much frightened and could see that my mother was nervous. Mr. Nettles was a well-dressed, sharp-faced, cruel-eyed, sloping-headed kind of a man when I got a good look at him, and I heard him laugh in a bitter, teasing way and say:

“Oh, a pacer, is he? That’s the best reason why he should be killed now and not allowed to grow up!” and then he laughed again, a nervous, mean laugh, and said to Master:

“Kill him now, and next time have sense enough to mate as good a mare as Lizzie with Harold Jr., down yonder in our barn.”

I learned afterwards that Mr. Nettles was a rich young

## Milly May

man from Kentucky, who had come down and become Master's partner both in his store and the horses; that he drank nearly all the time and was cruel and reckless; but he was considered a very fine trainer of trotters, and had the special care of the store and the trotters under him.

One look at Mr. Nettles told me all. I could see that he was heartless and selfish and would stop at nothing to carry his point. Unlike Master, who was good-natured, except when drinking, Mr. Nettles had the right name. He still kept sneering and kind of hissing it out through his teeth (for he ruled Master, I could see). "Now, are n't you a horseman," he sneered, "to mate as fine a mare as that with a common plug pacer? Give him to that nigger there to drown or knock him in the head! Or better still, I 'll do it myself."

He grabbed up a piece of a large oak limb and started toward us. I heard my mother say softly, but, oh, so earnestly: "Come, Hal, come! This is a dangerous animal, the Great White Man, the kind that values his own opinion, even if wrong, above all life. Having said you were of no account he will kill you to prove it. Come, this is the greatest and cruellest of all animals. When other animals kill, they kill only to eat; but this one kills for pure wantonness; not only weaker animals, but even his own kind, inventing terrible machine guns to kill the quicker and faster, and yet he claims to be the only animal who has a soul and a God! A God who expressly tells him not to kill. And the strangest part is that when he is n't naturally cruel and savage enough, he goes and gathers the kernels of our sweet corn and rye (that we love to eat so well) and rots it in vile tanks, and when it is full of teeming, dying bugs he drinks the juice and makes himself a beast, a devil. It is then that he knows neither law nor wife nor children nor God. This man was

## The Gift of the Grass

drinking that man-fire this morning, and he has been to the village store that keeps it, to poison men's minds and make them do all manner of foolish and violent things, and now his mind is afire and crazy with it and he is doubly dangerous."

My mother trembled with fear. "This creature is more to be feared than the sheep-killing dog and the sneaking, pacing mule. He is a man, Hal, *the White Man who does things!* Come," and she moved off quietly, I close to her side, and following. A great fear came over me. Up went my tail and I glided out by my mother's side. On came the man, puffing and swearing.

"We will gallop now," said my mother — "gallop! — it is one of the saddle gaits. Don't pace! *I can't do anything else, but don't mind me — I want you to be a blue ribboner.*"

My mother was thinking of my future, even in her great peril, and she glided faster and faster. I tried to gallop, but I could n't go fast. I tried to trot, but mixed up and shifted and struck my heels together. Then I heard the man swearing right behind me, and my mother was flying faster and faster.

I did n't know it, I was so scared; but up I went, neck to neck with her, faster, faster — oh, how it thrilled me! And to know that as fast a pacer as my mother was, I was right with her, nose and nose!

"Look! Look!" I heard Jim shout. "Lawd, but see him navigate — but see him step!"

"Let him be, Nettles," shouted Master, sillily; "he may be a trotter."

We had been around the lot twice, and I was leaving Mr. Nettles behind — he fell down again and again, he seemed so wobbly. Finally, with the aid of Master, who seemed half ashamed of himself, he penned us up where



“Didn’t ‘oo outpace ‘oo mammy?” she cooed in my ear.



## Milly May

the big rail fence makes a corner with the big field. Then my mother did a brave thing. Straight at the fence she went, reared, came down on it, bursting through it and kicking it down for me. I knew it was dangerous. I saw her shoulder bleeding, but I knew then what the word *mother* meant. But this only made Mr. Nettles madder, and he cursed mother soundly for an old fool.

Then it was I first saw Milly May. She came running out of the side door, her long hair tied up with dark ribbon, her cheeks flushed and her eyes ablaze. I thought I never saw an animal so graceful and beautiful.

“Dad! Dad! Lizzie!” she called to my mother, as she jumped over the broken fence after me.

It was funny to see how both of them stopped. Master, at the fence, grinned shamefacedly, and mother, all fear gone, coming up to the girl, who rubbed mother’s nose and patted her neck. I, panting, but wanting to fly still farther (for the wild joy of it all still burned in my veins), came up too, for somehow she drew me toward her by the sweet tone of her voice.

She was looking Master right in the eye and laughing ever so funny — a laugh that made him look nervous. “Now you go to the back porch,” she said, “and drink that long toddy I made for you an hour ago, and quit making a fool of yourself, Dad. Of all the wobbly fat things trying to catch a colt — and such a colt!” she said, putting one arm around my neck — “did n’t ‘oo outpace ‘oo mammy?” she cooed in my ear. “Well, ‘oo tan fly.”

Master wobbled off puffing. “All right, Milly May. Whatever you say, Milly May,” he began shamedly. But Milly May gave him a parting shot:

“And put in your shirt — do — you ‘ve run out of it, Dad, and made a fool of yourself all ‘round.”

## The Gift of the Grass

Jim had seen it and was rolling on the ground laughing. For which Master told him to shut up, and he went on in, very mad. But he never gets mad with Milly May.

Then she looked at Mr. Nettles. "I am certainly surprised at *you*," she said in a low voice, but carrying with it lots of meaning, I could see.

The man's mean look had given way to a very gallant air, and he smiled and said, coming up to her:

"Don't take our fun too seriously, Miss Milly May, we were just seeing how fast the little scrub could step," and he tried to pat me on the neck, but his very hand felt like Sheepkiller's eyes and I ran around on the other side of mother.

Milly May's nose twitched contemptuously. "Oh, scrub, is he? Well, Mr. Nettles, I 'll have you know that without any training — for he 's just born — he has shown more speed than any of the trotters you and Dad have been working on for a year or more. I saw him from the door."

Nettles laughed with a wicked little sound and bowed low. "Oh, I never dispute a girl's word, especially as pretty a girl as you," and he tried to flip her chin with his finger.

Then I saw that Milly May could get mad, too. She drew back and said:

"Don't you dare do that again, Mr. Nettles! You and Dad still think I am a child, but I am not, nor do I want your caresses or your attention."

"Why, he promised you to me!" laughed the man; "that was part of the contract we made five years ago, when I first came here from Kentucky, and saw you running around with that pretty, short schoolgirl gown and that plaited hair." Then he flashed that mean-looking light in his eyes I 'd never seen before — but I learned to

## Milly May

know it well afterwards — and came up to her, trying to smile: "Do you think I'd ever have traded with your father and formed this partnership with him if I hadn't thought some day I'd form a sweeter one with you?"

Milly May drew back from him.

"My father selects his own partner. So do I."

"You have been my little partner all along — I have told you all along, these five years, I was going to marry you when you finished school. Your father said I might."

"That's nonsense!" Milly May colored. "I thought you two were indulging in funny jokes. I'm going," she said, turning, "and I hope, Mr. Nettles, that you will never speak to me as a child again, nor on that subject."

He turned, his green eyes flashing.

"I'm going, too — I'm going to marry you as sure as you live! Do you hear it?" he repeated, all his fun gone. "It was part of the trade — your father said so — I have loved you from the day I first saw you, and whoever objects, or tries to object, will know who they are up against. Go ahead," he called mockingly, as she walked away, "you are mine! Do you know who I am, what blood is in my veins? My grandsire was a fighter, — Bob Alton, of Kentucky. My father was pedigreed and came from a long line of horse-racers and duellists. It's in our pedigree to own both women and horses when we want them, and I want you!" He was fairly hissing his words now.

Milly May turned on him, her brown eyes fairly blazing. "I have just as good a pedigree as you, and none of our women ever had to marry a man she did n't love. You talk of your fighting ancestry, but I'll have you know I had four great-grandsires at New Orleans, and three of them died on Jackson's firing line. As a child, and my father's daughter, I have been kind to you, humoring your joke about your going to marry me, thinking it was

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complimentary fun. But now that I am grown, and see you mean it, know henceforth that I despise you, and understand that Milly May is not a child for you to play with."

Her anger was unmistakable and his manner changed instantly.

"My, how pretty you look! Forgive me, Milly May — I just said it to see you look prettier," and he tried to reach her hand, but she turned and walked off, with her head up.

He stood looking at her, dumfounded. Then he cursed Jim for not hurrying up with his saddle horse, as he had told him, and after giving me and mother an evil look he mounted his horse and rode off.

But what do you think my mother did that night before I went to sleep under the big elm-tree? Kicked me soundly for pacing and not galloping as she told me!

"I hate to do it, Hal," she said, "but it is my duty. You 'll never be a blue ribbon winner. Let them kill you, but don't pace. The fields are full of pacers, all common and miserable."

It hurt awful, and I never forgot it. "The saddle gaits hereafter for me, mother," I whimpered; "Hal for the fairs and the blue ribbons."

And she whinnied softly, forgiving me.

## CHAPTER III

### MILLY MAY'S SECRET

AFTER that I felt as if I had now gone through all that a colt could go through, and had lived a long time, and that as I was still alive it meant that the Good God Bok (who, mother said, was the god of all dumb animals, and who was good to horses that did right) had brought me into the world for something. My mother always made me return thanks to the Good God Bok at night, and it does leave a most sweet feeling to go to sleep on.

How delightful it was to sleep out under the great, calm-faced moon, flecking its light all spangling over me through the elin-trees above! And to feel the soft, cool wind coming across the grass in waveLaughs and going right on over me, as I lay in the grass, and not hurting me a bit, just like I was grass, too.

I had gone to sleep with this nice feeling and the sweeter feeling of safety — for my mother slept standing, as big horses do, her head hanging low, right over me — when my good old friend, the earth, began to telegraph me sounds again.

I started to rise up, but my mother, who had also heard the message, without opening her drowsy eyes gave me the quick, little, half-asleep sound she makes to let me know not only that no harm was coming, but also that it was none of our business, and that I must not see nor hear anything, but go back to sleep.

Now, that is an awful long sentence to write all out in man-talk, but our language is so much simpler and means

## The Gift of the Grass

so much more. You will not believe me when I say that my mother told me all that in just one word, which, put into man-language, sounded something like *er-her-ruh-huh*, with her voice going down softly on the last syllable; but if it had gone up, as men would say, with a rising inflection, and a sharp, quick way, I should have jumped up quick, for it would have meant all the other meant, and *none of your business — you are not to notice it, but be up and ready to get away if it proves to be a foe!*

So mother went off to sleep and I, pretending to, moved my ears forward, peeped from one eye and listened. It was a young farmer man with a clean, good face and great, broad shoulders, with a little stoop in them of hard work. He stopped under a leaning hanging maple nigh us, and then — I actually jumped — despite my mother's sleepy *er-her-ruh-huh* twice! for he neighed exactly like a colt!

I thought sure it was Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right, but my mother had gone to sleep again, and I dared not say anything.

By and by I saw the side door open, and Milly May came slipping out, as pretty as ever. Down to the trees she came, passing right by me, her eyes shining and then — I am ashamed to say it, but they seized each other and the young man kissed her right on the lips! Then they sat down on the bench, and he put his right forearm around Milly May, and she tousled up all his mane and — I felt real silly for them — they cried! I heard much they said, but I could n't understand it, except that his name was Jack, and that he lived near by on a farm, and that he wanted Milly May to come live in his pasture always, and be his filly. But it made Milly May cry when she told him that her father, the Fat Red Faced Man, whom they called Squire, would kill him if he caught him there, be-

## Milly May's Secret

cause there was a feud in the families, and Jack's father had killed the Red Faced Man's brother in a street fight. But Milly May said she would love him always, though her heart was broken and though her father wanted her to marry another, she would *never, never, never* marry anybody but Jack, or die an old maid. Then he swore terrible sounding words about eternity, and forever and forever, and about her eyes being the stars that guided him there, and told her he would marry her and take her away, even if he had to run away with her. I shuddered at this, for I knew when horses ran away the very Booker is to pay.

But I loved to hear them cry and rub noses and talk in such a fine, high-funny way; although it sounded very silly, it made me both sad and happy and funny-feeling, and I wanted to help them.

They quit that after a while, for they just said all they had in them to say, which was not very different from what they said at first, and said it over again; and just sat holding hands and looking up into each other's face and the stars with such a silly expression on their faces that I had to laugh.

But instantly I stopped, for mother, whom I had thought was sleeping, flung up her head quickly and whinnied sharply, but ever so low and soft, so as to be heard only by me: "*Er-huh-ruh-huh!*"

The accent, too, as men say, was sharply on the first syllable, and I was on my feet in an instant. For written out in man-language that quick, sharp whinny meant: *Get up quick and be ready to get away. I smell danger out yonder in the night, which the two lovers under the tree do not see. But I am not yet sure whether it be danger for us or for them. Be quiet, be ready, smell keenly the wind, and look! I think it is an enemy.*

## The Gift of the Grass

My mother pawed the ground restlessly and put her nose to the earth. Then she threw up her head, scenting the wind and looking into the shadow of a thicket that was near the big house. The moonbeams fell across the open space, blinding me a bit; but I followed her gaze, using my better eyes, my nose — all the time, and striving my best to find out. For true to its breeding — its long line of effort through thousands of generations of wild horses — my nose first showed it to me. For out of the dark thicket, even as far off as it was, there came to me the man-smell, mingled with a sharp, pungent, unnaturally sweet odor, that came with his breath, and which in after years I learned to know as The Breath of the Corn-Juice. This smell was even stronger than the man-smell itself; and when we had it in a good line with our nose, although neither of us could see into the dark thicket, we both knew who and what it was, as plainly as if he stood by us in the moonlight. And that knowledge brought us both to tenseness and a quick preparation to get away. For every Great White Man carries a different man-smell to us — no two are alike. This one we knew too well; we had only too recent and sad a reason for knowing both it and the Corn-Juice smell, which had but that very morning been so tragically stamped upon our memories.

*Mr. Nettles was in that dark thicket, and he meant no good for Jack and Milly May!*

Men should be patient with us; for they cannot know how much we suffer because we cannot speak. Already I loved Jack and Milly May, and oh, how fiercely my heart beat, how I longed to tell them they were watched, to be careful, and run away!

Think, ye people of the Great White Race, how we suffer when we would save a friend and have no tongue to tell it!

My mother pawed the ground nervously, and I, forget-

## Milly May's Secret

ting myself, neighed my little colt neigh of terror. But it seemed only to make Milly May think of me, and not of her own danger as I hoped, for she laughed and began to tell Jack all about me and the exciting times she had that morning trying to save my life.

"And do you know, Jack," she said, "I thought of you; for I knew that although you were my farmer boy" — Jack kissed her again — "you had a little stable and you *do* know a horse when you *see* one, Jack."

Jack laughed. "Well, it depends, Milly May. I'm afraid I'm not much at it."

"But a *fast* one, Jack — a natural genius! Oh, I do so want you to get hold of that funny little Hal! Why, Jack, you know how old Lizzie can pace?"

"Yes," said Jack, "Lizzie would have been a great mare if there had been purses for pacers in her day."

"Well," went on Milly May, "do you know when that cruel man — oh, Jack, I have something to tell you about him, and I have come to dread him and his influence over Dad."

(I was still watching the dark thicket, and I saw something move, slipping nearer. Mother saw it and pawed, snorting.)

Milly May stopped. "Why, what's the matter with Lizzie and little Hal?" she said. "See, Jack, yonder he is now. Of course, he is n't pretty — neither are you, dear —" she said it ever so coyly (and there was another kiss) — "but — but — Jack, he is — oh, Jack — as Jim says, he is '*oil in de can*,'" and she laughed softly. "In that awful chase to-day," she went on, "he paced as fast as his mother. Think of it. The little thing only a day old, pacing for his life — that cruel man! Oh, Jack, I simply despise him —"

Mr. Nettles must have heard her, for I saw him slip

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from the thicket to the shadow of the big oak, within ten yards of where Jack and Milly May were talking.

Mother snorted loudly and I neighed. Jack looked up quickly.

“Milly May, sweetheart —” he said it very low — “you had better slip into the house now. Something is wrong with the horses. There is some secret danger near. Go now, I’ll see you soon. I must go and see if the colt is safe, or what it is that has frightened them; but I know it is something. And I cannot let you run the risk of being seen here with me. We know it is all right, but there are others.”

Milly’s face was white under the moonlight. She kissed him and darted from shadow to shadow until she reached the side porch, then she slipped in and vanished.

Jack turned to go, and I almost screamed in my desire to tell him, for in coming toward us he passed within a few feet of Mr. Nettles.

Nettles stepped out, fronting him, and Jack stopped, and then I saw how cool he was, although Mr. Nettles was so angry that he could scarcely talk.

“Good evening, Mr. Nettles,” said Jack.

“You seem to be having a mighty good time,” sneered Mr. Nettles, not noticing Jack’s salutation.

Jack turned on him calmly. “I am sorry, Mr. Nettles, that you have had demonstrated to you the old adage about eavesdroppers. As for the rest, sir, I cannot see that it is any of your business.”

Nettles fairly darted out, facing him angrily. “It is my business, I’ll have you know! If you stole that mare there,” he said, pointing to mother, “it would be her father’s business, for she is his. But if you steal *her* — Milly May, that is *my* business, for she is *mine* — she is promised to me!”

## Milly May's Secret

Jack turned white in the moonlight — then flushed hot, and I saw his great fist crinkling beneath the arm of sinew and bone above it. But he was one who masters himself, and I saw that he knew instantly that a blow there would be fatal both for him and Milly May.

“Lie down,” said my mother to me, “lie down! We are in no danger. It is Jack he is after. Lie down and sleep. Let the Great White Men fight their own battles.”

And seeing that I was so very much excited, she added in a low whinny: “Learn not to trouble yourself about their affairs, so long as they concern not you. This is the White Man’s favorite fight — the fight of the two for the one woman. If it means blood, you want to smell it not. If it means peace, it also concerns not you. Lie down and sleep!”

I lay down on the cool grass, but I could not sleep. Very much I wanted to see if it was blood or peace.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PROMISE OF MILLY MAY

"WE might just as well have a settlement of this thing here," said Mr. Nettles, in a loud voice, much louder than I had heard him speak before, and I could see that he kept feeling for the handle of something he had in his hip pocket.

Jack saw it too and he stood quick-eyed and alert, but very quiet.

"I have never been cowardly enough in my life, Mr. Nettles, to carry a concealed pistol in my pocket. I am unarmed, but I am afraid of neither you nor your pistol. If you 'll get off of these grounds I 'll fight you any way you wish, armed or unarmed. You have me at a disadvantage, I am sorry to admit. And now here a quarrel between us makes it hard for —"

Nettles laughed nervously.

"You ought to have thought of her before you put her in such a fix. Yes, my young Romeo, I 've got you dead to rights to-night. I 'm armed and I could kill you like a prowling dog — and it would serve you right. Or I could whisper to her father what I have seen and he would kill you as he would a hound. You know the feud. You remember your father killed his brother. In either case it would start talk that would ruin the girl. Now there it is. Which will you take? Will you save yourself or the girl?"

Never was I so fooled in the Great White Man's quietness as I was in Jack. I learned afterwards to know that

## The Promise of Milly May

his calmness was the beginning of things with him. He came indifferently up to Nettles, who again sneered out:

“Which will you save, my Romeo ?”

“Both,” said Jack, so quick and strange for him, that I saw my mother jump and snort, and when I, too, sprang to my feet to see, there had been something which looked to me like horse play, for one of Jack’s great hands was in Nettles’ collar, and Nettles’ breath was coming in gasps like I afterward saw in the great race when Billy Boy broke down, his breath gurgling and roaring within him. And Jack’s other hand had taken the flashing dark-handled thing from Nettles as he tried to draw it; and he did it all just as if he were a Great White Giant man playing with a boy. And all the time he held Nettles limp and powerless until he held the bright thing in his hand, and then he swept Nettles away with a sweep of his great arm, until he fell helpless on his back and rose tottering and staggering, but fronting Jack with the most wicked eyes, loud-voiced and furious. But Jack had coolly opened the thing he held and taken out its pellets. Then he tossed it back to Nettles and said:

“It’s man to man now — come on!”

But Mr. Nettles’ struggles and cries while he was choking under Jack’s terrible grip in his collar had aroused those in the house, bringing out the Fat Red Faced Man, furious, and with another weapon in his hands, and Milly May holding to it and to him and begging him not to use it.

“Come, come,” said my mother, “let us be going, for this now concerns us, since we are in the line with the Thing-Which-Goess-Off-With-A-Noise and scatters death. Why can’t they let us sleep?”

It was soon over, but I saw enough. It was Milly May who settled it — with tears it was she. It was her promise and the coolness and great courage of Jack, which mother

## The Gift of the Grass

said kept back great, sharp, sulphur-smelling reports under the peaceful trees, and saved our sweet grass from being spoiled with blood

Never, she promised her father, if he hurt not Jack now, never would she meet him or write him again. And she promised it, weeping and holding her father around the neck.

But Jack only said as he stood up before the Red Faced One, now livid with bitter anger:

“You have heard her promise. It is not mine. You had better kill me now. Good night and good bye, Milly May.”

I was glad enough when the lights in the house were all out and everything was quiet, and mother had led me away that I might sleep where the grass was deepest and softest under the trees; for I had seen (by a strange working of what I afterwards heard the Great White Man call Chance, or Fate) that day more of what they call tragedy than I was destined to see again in a year. And though there was much of it which I did not fully understand, marvel not that I can describe it so accurately; for be it known that though I was only a colt, yet by the great laws which regulate our lives our years are short compared to the Great White Man’s, we are full grown when only three years old and are endowed with what senses we have, fully developed, even when we are first born.

But dumb thing that I was, I had my first great wonder — a thing then and still unknown, unsolved by me. Into a beautiful world I had come, a world which seemed to me to be both sweet and complete in the gift of the grass, that brought both life and hope. Why should evil be, and what did it all mean, these myriads of men and animals, that come and go, each playing his little selfish game and all so soon forgotten?

## CHAPTER V

### THE FEUD OF THE GREAT WHITES

THAT night my mother told me all about our family and of the terrible Great White feud that made Jack's and Milly May's people hate each other so. And under the stars I listened to her as she bent over me, half sleeping, half talking in her horse way.

"It all began over your sire when he was not much older than you," said she. "And perhaps this is as good a time as ever for you to know about your sire and the hard time he has had trying to be something in the Life of Things, and establish a family of horses worth while. For your father's idea of life is that we must do what we are born to do, and do it the best that it can be done. And since Bok made us horses, whose business it is to serve the Great Whites, the better we serve them the better for the whole Great World of Things, of which we are only a small part.

"But it does seem as if the Good Bok has been hard on our family of Hals, since our story up to now is but one long tale of work, abuse, ringbone, plough-chaffs and sore back, while others, called the Trotters and Thoroughbreds, who are not half so useful as we (since we also carry men under the saddle as well as to wheel), have got all the high places of the land. Take your first ancestor, of whom we know but little — he, the little roan pacer called Tom Hal. A doctor (whom we call a Great White Blood-letter) named Boswell bought him in Philadelphia and

## The Gift of the Grass

rode him to Kentucky, and so fine were his gaits and so iron his bottom that this cruel man under a wager, rode him one hot August day a distance of seventy-five miles, and back the next. It was cruel — cruel — but just like the Great White and what he is still doing to us."

"Did he do it, mother?" I asked. "Did our first sire do it — go that long journey in one day and back?"

"Did he do it?" said my mother in no good humor for being interrupted — "did any of our tribe ever fail to do a thing that takes nerve and bone and grit? But," she added sadly, "the Great White Blood-letter rode his eyes out."

"Oh," I said, jumping up, "oh, did they fall out on the ground?" and I shut mine tight for fear I'd see them the next minute lying on the grass.

"Sit down," said my mother sternly. "You have much yet to learn. I meant that he rode him till he went blind. You have seen how close we came to a blood-letting to-night," she went on after a while. "That was all on account of your sire, as I said. When he was a yearling Jack's uncle, then a boy, saw him and, boy-like, wanted the colt. His owner told him he might have him for one hundred of our *flukes* — or what they call dollars — and the boy begged his father so often and persistently for the money that he finally gave it to him. Now the owner was an unscrupulous horse trader — a *hippo-fixer* in our language — and he fixed the boy, making him pay the one hundred and give his note for seventy-five more, although he was but a boy and his note was not good. But a *hippo-fixer* has plans of his own, as you will see; for the Great Killing was going on then among the Whites, which they call War. This is a thing you cannot understand, for no horse can, it being so contrary to our

## The Feud of the Great Whites

nature. The more so because the Great Whites have both a law and a religion which forbids them killing each other, and for any violation of it in times of peace they take the guilty one out and hang him by the neck until he is dead. And they do this despite the fact that the poor hung one has a soul, and is more often hung for being neglected and not being taught and having his means of living taken by smarter men, or inheriting evil natures from evil ancestors. Still they hang him, sending his soul to their Hulee forever.

“Then all at once the evil one breaks out in them and they forget their law and their religion, and even that they have souls, and gather up in their hands the Sulphur-Speaking-Things, and in great bodies of long lines stand up and shoot each other to death until our sweet grass is wet with their blood and a terrible stench fills the air. And they burn each other’s homes, and kill the babes of each other who know not what it means, and rob each other of Things Garnered, and set fire to homes and barns, and ruin innocent maids, and lay waste the lands as no dumb thing would do.”

“O Mother,” I said, “this cannot be true — not the Great Whites who know so much and have a soul and a God!”

“It is all true,” she said sadly — “I saw it. Sit down and let me tell it. So in this Great Killing was the *hippo-fixer*, and under cover of war he was called a Bush Whacker, and he came with his band and stole your sire by night, and when the little boy came for his colt, following them, he beat him and made his father pay another hundred *flukes*. But the little boy was glad to get his colt at any price, and they hid your sire in a cave in the dark for full thirty moons until the Great Killing was over. And there is where he all but died, and took fistula which

## The Gift of the Grass

still shows in his shoulder to this day. He had a terrible time.

“Now as to the feud — it all began from that. For when the Great Killing was over, because it looked as if everybody that could be killed was killed and all the homes burnt and the land devastated, this *hippo-fixer* came back to live there, and he killed Jack’s uncle about the colt. It was a cruel and bloody thing — such as the Great White loves to do, and he left him lying by the roadside where he had waylaid and shot him. Jack’s father owned me, and when he heard his brother was shot he put the saddle on me and rode into the town.”

My mother was silent a while, looking away as if thinking. But my own heart beat so fast I could scarcely wait to see what the Great Whites did, for I am ashamed to say it, but I loved greatly to hear of their killing, there was something in it so full of the power of Bok.

“Well,” she said, “it was a short, quick fight. He opened on that *hippo-fixer*, for they were both mounted and they fought it out in the village streets. I heard my rider say: ‘Draw your gun, you *highwayman*,’ and they faced and soon the popping thunder cracked about my ears and the smell of the vile sulphur and bullets whizzed about my ears. But I knew it meant life or death for my master, so I stood stanch and true and did no dodging or *hippo-jigging*, and his aim was true, and I saw the *hippo-fixer* reel and pitch out of the saddle while hundreds of Great Whites looked on, but no man raised a hand. And when he fell my rider spurred me up to the staring-eyed, gasping man in the road and reaching down said: ‘Damn you, here’s to the spirit of my brother, you dirty, home-made Yankee!’ and he fired a ball into his brain so close the powder blackened his face. Then he wheeled and rode away, and no man has ever touched him; for despite of

## The Feud of the Great Whites

all their law and religion they have an unwritten law that is ahead of all law and says *a tooth for a tooth and a life for a life!*

"Now you see what these two *hippo-huggers* are up against," said my mother, "and why the Red Faced One would rather see Milly May dead than that Jack should have her. But that is like the Great White — to love hardest where it is hardest to get, and to brave death to get it. And for that I admire them," she said, "though I see nothing ahead for Jack and Milly May but heart-breaks, or as we call it *nag-numbness*."

"And my sire," I asked, "tell me —"

"Oh," she said, "he has lived a dog's life. We are nothing, Hal — just common pacers, though in truth we trace back to the most ancient of horses owned by the Great Whites whom they call Greeks and Romans and Egyptians. Your sire has had to pull a tan-bark mill around and around — think of it, the founder of our family doing the menial work of mules and asses. But Hal! Hal!" and her eyes lit up! "he is great! the world will yet know of him. Though chained to a tan-bark mill he dreams of a faith he has which he calls the Star Pointers and nothing daunts him! he does the duty nearest him and has fixed his thoughts on the stars.

"But he will tell you — wait till you see him. He will tell you of his wonderful dreams and he will write you great batches of grander things than I can say. Take heed when he speaks to thee, son, and now go to sleep."

"But how," I asked, "did Jack and Milly May ever meet, seeing their families hate each other so?"

"Oli," said she, "how do two springs meet to run into the river? Go to sleep!"

After that I liked Master, the Red Faced Man, less, and though he still swore whenever anybody mentioned

## The Gift of the Grass

my name to him and said I was no 'count, I had grown in a few weeks lusty and larger, but only then just about half as big as Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right.

And Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right would never play with me except to do me a mean trick, such as stepping on my leg when I slept, and saying he did n't see me, I was so like the color of the ground; and kicking me when he caught me off, and saying, "Oh, excuse me, sir, I thought you were a goat, sir—a thousand pardons!" and then he would run off making mouths.

I was very no 'count to the Red Faced Man and to Mr. Nettles, but when I was a month old, and Jim told him he 'd give ten dollars for me and raise me on a bottle and not pester the Great White Man any more, he said:

"No—no—I guess he 's worth more than that—just let him be. But if you want to see a *horse*," he said, "a *real* horse—" he pointed at Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right.

At this Jim laughed, and I heard him say something like "a great big duffer."

I felt sorry for Jim, for I felt I ought to belong to him, since I owed him my life.

And though Milly May would bring my mother sugar nearly every day and pet me much she seemed not to me the same jolly Milly May that I first saw run out of the house, so full of life and fun.

I asked mother what the White Man's great big duffer was, and she said it was a horse who looked grand and talked big but quit when the real work came. Then she told me we called them *hippo-jammers*, and she would rather see me dead and in Hulee than to see me a *hippo-jammer*.

## CHAPTER VI

### I AM SOLD TO THE CAPTAIN

BUT one day I saw another man ride up; he also was red faced but clean-shaven, with a quick, brusque way of speaking, yet with kindly blue eyes, though most determined.

“That colt,” he said, “Tom Hal’s and Lizzie’s, let me see it.”

Master was very proud to show me, and they came up to where we were. I threw up my tail, the old fear came over me, and I prepared to run from the Red Faced Man; but mother told me with a grunt that I knew not the ways of man and to be quiet.

They walked around us, looking at me, and knowing how ugly I was I felt that I was in for criticism and abuse. Imagine my surprise when Master, the Red Faced Man, said:

“Ain’t he a dandy, Captain?”

I looked up quickly at mother, for I thought the man was making fun of me; but she only smiled and gave me the grunt that said: “Be quiet, this is one of the ways of man when he would trade and do his brother.”

“Look,” went on my master, pointing at what he had once called my cat-hams, “did you ever see such driving power? Why, he is muscled like a quarter horse, ribbed like a plough-horse, and with legs as clean as a thoroughbred.”

I could not help it. I smiled at mother, and up went my

## The Gift of the Grass

head and tail. But the Captain just glanced at me and kept looking at my mother.

“Great mare — great mare,” he said, at which my mother curled her lip sarcastically.

“Pity she has so no-count a colt,” said the Captain.

Down went my head and tail, while I grunted to mother, “*What does it mean?*”

But mother had gone to sleep, grunting to me, “I have heard it all before — it makes me tired.”

“And what a head!” went on the master — “see what a brain pan!”

The Captain laughed derisively. “You have n’t mentioned his ewe neck, I see.”

“Ewe neck!” said Master, “was n’t old Boston, sire of Lexington, that way? Is n’t all great horses, great race-horses, ewe-necked more or less?”

“Yes,” said Captain, “especially less. Say,” he went on, “I don’t know as I’d care to have that thing on my place, but my little boy has been wanting a pony to ride to school, and as you say this colt goes all the saddle gaits, and as I think he’ll make a fourteen-hand pony, I was thinking I might offer you ten dollars for him.”

“Ten dollars!” and Master laughed, “why, that would n’t buy his tail! Honest, Captain, did you ever see a prettier tail? Why, it’s worth ten dollars itself! Now, look here, you may have him tail and all for forty dollars, but may I drop dead if I would take thirty-nine dollars and ninety-nine cents.”

To save my life I could not help it. Up went my beautiful tail.

“It looks like a bunch of flax,” said the other man. “Tush!”

Down it went!

“Oh, I don’t want him,” said the Captain indifferently.

## I am Sold to the Captain

“Thought maybe my boy might. Come, I must be going, it’s getting late. Come to think of it he is n’t weaned yet. Oh, I don’t want him; I must go.”

At this I was dreadfully disappointed, for somehow I had liked the Captain from the first, and I did so want to go to his home — anywhere to get away from Sheep-killer and Gray Lize and the master that would kill me.

“O mother,” I cried softly, “the new man is going and — and — and —”

“Wait,” said my mother, “be quiet — it’s all in the game. That’s the way the Great White Man does. I have seen them before. He is n’t going yet. That’s part of the game — he liked you from the first. Just wait.”

“Oh,” went on my master, “not weaned; yes, but you are welcome to take Lizzie along till he is weaned; just let her run on your pasture.”

“My pasture is too short now for my own horses. I must go,” he said, starting to walk off.

“Say, Captain,” called Master, “say, now, I know what a fool you are about the Hal side-wheelers. I am going in for trotters. Look at that colt,” he said, pointing to Hambletonian-Junior Sir-Registered-And-All Right; “now you can’t get him for two hundred; they’re the stuff — they are fashionable and the world wants them. Now these Hals are good common horses, but there is no purse for them and no chance for them to race. I want to get rid of all of them and go into trotters. And though this one is the greatest colt I ever saw to be a Hal —” (up went my tail), “I’ll sell him just to clean up. I’ll tell you what, I’ll do it for you, but nobody else living could get him for the price, say thirty-seven dollars and take him, the greatest Hal colt that ever was foaled.”

He said it so earnestly that I believed every word of it, and I felt a strange thrill run up my back and into my

## The Gift of the Grass

heart, making me feel so grand. I could n't help it, I just strutted around my mother trying to catch her eye, but she told me to quit. "If you keep up that fool gait," she said, "you will be nothing but a *hippococker* — a horse strutter."

"Oh, I could n't put that into a little sheep-pony," said the Captain. "I 'm going, good-bye," — he turned again to his horse.

I lay down suddenly on the grass. "Go to sleep," said mother, "as you see I 'm going to do; you are silly now and believe all you hear, but if you listen to the Great White Animals long you will believe nothing."

I tried to, but that last remark of the Captain, "that *sheep-pony*," just seemed to kill me. I thought that I was kin to Sheepkiller. I stretched my head on the grass and tears rolled down.

"Wait!" shouted Master, "wait a minute!" and he picked up a dry limb on the ground, a terrible rattling brush, and flew savagely at mother, giving her a sharp rap with it.

She was asleep and it frightened her so she jumped ten feet and flew off in that long pace she had, so sudden she forgot me. Almost crazed with fear, for the Red Faced Man looked as he did that first day when he drank the corn-juice, I followed her. Forgetting all about my saddle gaits I struck the long gait from instinct and breeding, and, with tail out, fairly flew in the pace to overtake my mother, for I thought sure the man had drunk of the corn-juice and was crazy.

Instead I saw them both looking at me, the Red Faced One smiling in delight and the other trying not to.

"Look! Look!" shouted Master, "now is n't that a side-wheeler for you! Ho — ho —" he went on, slapping the Captain on the back, "oh no, he can't pace at all!"

## I am Sold to the Captain

My mother, who had been so startled, now saw what it was for, and with a bitter remark about the cruelty and heartlessness of the Great White Man, when he would sell things for his dollar, his fluke, she brought me back to the tree in no good humor. "They are all *fluke flunkers*," she said — fluke being our word for our money.

I came back thinking that the Captain would take me at once, but he only said: "Too bad — too bad! I thought he was a saddle pony, and he can't do anything but pace — too bad — too bad!"

I lay down on the grass. I wept — I felt as if I had bots.

"Tell you what I 'll do," he said after a while, "I think I can get him over that — I 'll just give you twenty dollars for him and I 'll drop dead in my tracks before I 'll make it another dime."

I jumped up quick, for I saw that the Captain really wanted me. I paced beautifully around my master, which made them all laugh.

Master said: "Why, that colt, Cap'n, that colt, he 'll be the greatest pacer in the world some day."

Around, around my master and the tree I went, pacing my best.

"I 'll make it twenty-five," said the Captain, "being it 's you. I know if it stays here it 'll be starved to death and ruined on a barb wire. I 'll make it twenty-five and I 'll swear to heaven I 'll die before I 'll add a nickel. Wouldn't do it now except to keep a good colt from starving — always hated to see one go that way."

The master got terribly mad, at least I thought so, and they swore at each other in a half-joking way for several minutes, each calling the other all kinds of awful funny names, and my master saying he would die and let the crows pick him before he would give away the greatest pacing colt ever foaled to a fool.

## The Gift of the Grass

used that on all occasions. They would eat greedily whole troughs of corn and fodder, until they were so full they could not go through the stall door, nor lie down with comfort; and then, when the rest of us wanted to go to sleep, they would have indigestion and would begin to pray to the Good God Bok, that if he would help them to digest the cobs and corn they had eaten they would never do it again! Their tempers were bad and they would quarrel dreadfully with each other, but it only seemed to make them love each other the more.

They seemed to enjoy their church greatly (which Billy said was because they did n't have much else to enjoy), and they were never satisfied unless they were running down the churches of others, or tattling tales, or telling all the scandalous things that had happened in the barn. We were soon told by them that though Mrs. Lightfoot, the thoroughbred mare, who stalled near us, was very attractive, and religious in her old age, once she had actually been the running mate of a very wicked race-horse who carried her a merry clip. And that her pretty daughter, Miss Lightfoot, was dreadfully fast.

They told us that they belonged to the church of the Tail Holders, and they lost no time in telling mother that I ought to be baptized at once into the church of the Tail Holders. It seems that Old Lamplighter, the donkey with the expressionless face, whom the Captain kept in a stall by himself, was their High Priest. He baptized by seizing each candidate by the tail and dipping it in the horse pond. After this they were cleansed and their sins were all in the horse pond (which Billy said was why he never drank there, as he preferred to have his bots on the outside). Still they thought they were saved and after death went to the Good God Bok, where they lived in Haidee for all eternity, holding to the

## In Our Barn

tail of Bok, who was a great horse, bigger than our world.

Then there were the Kunnel Sah, and the Majah Sah, the two old horses. The Kunnel Sah had been a cavalry horse during the war and was in Morgan's raid, while the Majah Sah was an artillery horse under Forrest.

These were gallant old fellows, given most profusely to talking even on common events in the most flowery, bombastic language, and taking a drink (whenever they could slip the chance) out of the Captain's bottle of horse liniment, which he always kept over the stable door. It was a vile concoction of whiskey, arnica, ammonia, assafœtida, and witch-hazel, and why they cared for it at all I never could see. After supper and a drink or two from the bottle they would begin every night and tell us all about the Great Killing, or in our language, *Hulee-helling*, which is our name for war.

But the Kunnel Sah and the Majah Sah were big-hearted, gallant old fellows, and it was amusing to hear them talk, telling the same tale over every night about the Great War, or *Hulee-helling*.

They kept Darky, the old black mule, to wait on them, which seemed to please them very much and made Darky very happy. When spoken to, Darky would always say, "Yassah, Boss, yassah," and then get around quickly to keep them from kicking his ribs.

He was a funny old chap, and old parson Jake, the wise old Black Man with the roached hair, used to haul stable manure with him hitched to a cart. But Darky did many tricks. He knew how to unlatch gates and doors, and every night he'd go out and steal roasting ears, apples, and garden truck for us all and bring it into the barn. Old Jake would see his tracks the next day in the orchard or garden and beat him, which he seemed to

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enjoy very much. In fact, he did not seem happy if he did not get a beating every day.

Then there was Mrs. Lightfoot, an old thoroughbred mare who traced her pedigree back to the family of Andrew Jackson, and her daughter, Miss Lightfoot, who was not really a Miss, but a grass widow, that had gone back to her first name (Billy said she called herself Miss because she *missed* it in matrimony). She stalled with her mother, Mrs. Lightfoot, who used to spend her spare time telling us how many mules her father, Colonel Lightfoot, owned before the *demdyengees* set them free, and about the Old Times, and what a fine thing it was to do nothing and be groomed twice a day and run races for million-dollar purses and hear the music of the grandstand and have wreaths of roses thrown over your neck when you won, and drink champagne and be carried around to race tracks in cars.

"Now," she said, "what am I reduced to? Teaching a class of kindergarten scrubs, like that little cat-hammed-pacer, and its lobsided cold-blooded dam, a thing my people would n't associate with before the war, but now coming up and even presuming to break into the society races."

She did not intend for us to associate with her just because she made her living teaching us the proper gaits, and it amused me to hear my mother telling of their society ways. I found out afterwards that both the Lightfoots could say sweet things to your face and make you think they were so fond of you, when they wanted a favor or to borrow corn and oats and get one for a pupil. But at the Great White Man's Fair, or at his First Mondays in town, they never could see us if we met them.

The old-maid mules lost no time telling us the weak point in the life of the Lightfoots, and that the old lady

## In Our Barn

had had at least three husbands, "and all of them very fond of grass," said Billy dryly.

In the stall next to us was an old gray mare who kept talking in a nasal twanging wheeze to my mother. They called her Granny Gray, and she was always taking herbs or giving teas of them.

"Better give that air colt some spatter-dock tea; hit 'll make his inoon eyes drap reg'lar, an' I 'll tell ye now, Mistress Hal, a little catnip ain't bad for to keep off colt-colic. I kin see now his eyes is gwinter be weak — hoarhound an' slippery elm will fix 'em. Don't furgit, Mistress Hal."

She was a kind old soul and mother promised her. But mother alone nursed me, saying that Bok knew what I needed better than the doctors, and he put it all there for me.

I learned from the others in the barn all about our religion; and though there were three different sorts in our barn, as I shall presently relate, they all believed in the Good God Bok, the god of all the animals. He lived in Haidee, a beautiful place of evergreen trees and grass and perennial streams and statues of delightful rock salt, each representing some sainted and great horse, standing always in the grass by the stream and free for all to lick, though never, amid all eternity, growing any less. The idea was just as pleasant and beautiful as if in the White Man's Heaven there should be scattered around in mint beds, statues of George Washington, William Shakespeare, and Andrew Jackson, made out of lump sugar and near a perennial stream of Kentucky and Tennessee whisky.

But there was also a bad, black god, named Booker, who lived in Hulee, under the ground, where wicked animals went for eternal punishment.

This punishment was horrible. Just at sun-up every

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morning, they were hung up by the heel in Booker's Great Shambling Pen, and skinned alive with a dull Barlow knife, and turned loose bleeding, to run around all day and browse on dog fennel and Scotch thistles. By night a new skin would grow out, which Booker would take off next morning with just as much satisfaction as before, and so on forever. These skins Booker sold to the White Man's Devil for hides for the Whites who lost their hides over the devil's pit. And Booker, who was the God of all the Boot-Leggers, took his pay in mean whisky.

It was awful, and I was sorry they told me anything about it, for I was happy before I heard of it, doing naturally what I thought was right and kind. But after that I was scared stiff when I thought of death, and was almost afraid to sleep for fear I should wake up in Hulee. The strange thing about all of this religion was that it was all based on unnatural, cruel, and revengeful punishment, instead of a natural kindness and forgiveness.

I soon understood why Billy was called a nervous goat — and would drop down dead, as Shep said, when he was suddenly frightened, or was called on suddenly to do anything, such as helping us around the barn.

As I said, I was admiring Billy's great dignity, he looked so venerable and grand, and I was just about ready to say my prayers to him, thinking he was the Great God Bok, when, just as Shep left me, a horsefly as big as a buzzard, swooped down on the small of my back, just out of reach of my tail, and O Hulee, how it hurt when he stuck his big bill in! Down the hall I dashed, screaming and breaking away from mother. Some geese were in my path, and they squawked, flapping and trying to run. I saw Billy and expected, of course, to jump over him; for I was in a hurry and wanted to find a place where I could back up and rub off the horsefly. But Billy commenced to bob

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up and down and try to get away, and then he stiffened and fell down kicking and dying, as he afterwards told me, "as natural as life."

I nearly broke my neck falling over him. I forgot the fly. I forgot everything except that I had killed him.

"O Mother!" I cried, "I've killed him. I've killed our Great God Bok!"

I heard the Captain and the man who was leading mother laugh, and Billy kicked and stiffened around, and lay still awhile for all the world as if he was dead. Then he sat up, slowly, still chewing his tobacco, and as mad as he could be:

"*Booker-skin-you!*" he cried (which was his oath for damning me) — "what do you mean by that? Don't you see that I am a nervous goat?"

No one had cursed me before, and it made me very mad.

"*Booker-skin-yourself!*" I shouted back, and glared at him: "I am nervous myself, and you'd be, too, if a horsefly was boring a hole in you!"

At this Billy laughs and shakes hands with me, and we become fast friends.

I soon found that the Majah Sah and the Kunnel Sah and the Lightfoots were all High Churchers and belonged to a church which they called the Saddle Sitters. Their preacher was an outclassed thoroughbred stallion named Wind Jammer, who, Billy said, had run pretty lively races in his younger days, but being broken down and outclassed, had taken to the church. They also believed in the Good God Bok (as did all good animals), but their creed was that they sat in the saddle on his back and rode around in Haidee forever.

"And," said Billy, "there is another religion that is made up to suit. The fact is every one of them makes of his god the thing he wants him to be. These horses now, having been ridden all their lives, want to ride some

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other horse in the next world, and so fix it as they would like it to be. None of their gods ever get beyond their own little brains. And all their religion is based on a selfishness which the real Bok (who is far too vast and grand for our little minds to comprehend) never intended. What 's holding on to some other animal's tail, or riding on his back forever, or loafing around in meadows licking salt statues but the rankest selfishness and laziness? Have n't they sense enough to know that if we have to work and strive here to attain anything worth while, they 'll have to do it in the other life, if there is any for them, and on a scale vaster and grander? Bah! can't the fools see that if loafing and selfishness cannot make people happy here it cannot make them happy hereafter? Bah!"

And Billy bit off a fresh chew of pennyroyal weed and looked afar off towards the stars.

"I should like to know what church you belong to?" I said timidly, for he had greatly impressed me with his views.

"I," he said with great dignity, and chewing pennyroyal, "I belong to the church of the Butt-Headers. We don't know what is in the Great Beyond, nor whether there is Hulee or Haidee, we only know that we are here, with heads made for butting, and we naturally presume from that that the Great God Bok intended for us to butt in. We maintain that only by studying ourselves can one learn of the motives of the Great God Bok. All the religions that teach an eternal tail-holding, or saddle-sitting, or standing still or loafing in Haidee are false, because the very idea of existence means *doing* and he who stops doing stops to die. Every animal must take his belief from his body, for Bok made this body and made it for the things he wanted done. My head means butting.

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Good, I butt in. My horns are for fighting. Good, I fight. I have many wives. Why? Bok made more Nannies than he made Billies, and so very plainly tells me I am to take a few extra ones. He makes grass sweet to my taste — I eat it. He makes the shade cool for me, the trees are mine, the streams, the soft places in the hay. He makes us to go in flocks, and in that he says as plainly as can be that in unity we are strong and that it should be sweet for us to live together in kindness, helping one another. Plainly he says in all this: *Be kind to your kind and to your neighbor's kind, and fight only when you must.*

“Now take yourself,” he went on, eyeing me very closely, “since you have honored me by asking for my opinion of these things, look at your form, your clean strong legs and compact body and strong driving hips. Your religion should be *speed — speed* — using your legs to go. Use the things Bok gave you here to use — both the things of the body and the things of the mind — defiling none of them by uses contrary to their Maker’s aim. Do the best you can with them, with no evil to any living creature, and let the Hereafter take care of itself.

“Bah, the Butt-Header’s is the only religion that amounts to anything,” he went on sagely. “All these Tail-Holders and Saddle-Sitters who preach peace here and eternal laziness hereafter, I tell you, Hal, are no good. The Peace-Makers are food for the first strange animal that comes along, and the way to protect yourself or convert the other fellow to your way of thinking is to let him know that you can butt it into him if necessary.

“Take yonder foolish and timid sheep,” he said, pointing to the flock on the hill-side; “they were given by Bok stronger heads than ours and bigger horns and more wool to protect their bodies from blows, but years ago they adopted the *Baa-baa* religion, their motto being

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*Peace at any price, and good will to all,* and they are the food for every yellow dog that lives. I have known Sheep-Killer to kill whole families of them in a night, despite their prayers and beseeching and kindness of heart. They live only to be food for some other animal — man or dog. But we Butt-Headers — I 'd like to see Sheep-Killer try it on me once," he said, shaking his great head of splendid horns.

## CHAPTER VIII

### I MEET REDDY AND MY SIRE

I WAS asleep the next afternoon under an elm (for my experience in the barn the night before had left me worn out and tired), when I made the acquaintance of another person whom I must not forget to mention.

It was a beautiful, drowsy afternoon, one where the hazy skies seem to slumber sweetly and quietly over you and the very tree-leaves hang low in drowsy dreams. I had played "*Round, round the race I go,*" a little game my mother had taught me, in which she stood under a tree in the centre of a little race-track as though judging the race, and I ran around her playing race-horse or *nag-acting*, until I had grown tired and had stretched out on the soft, cool grass to sleep. With one eye half cocked I could see my mother grazing a little way off, and I began to dream drowsy dreams with tickling sensations up my tail.

Then came something which sounded like thunder — *Boo-hoo!* — and a terrible noise in my ears. I jumped from a dream into the air, and there behind the elm hollering *boo-hoo-boo!* was the red-headed colt of the Great White Man, in jean pants and straw hat, and coming at me clapping his hands and shouting terribly.

I wheeled to run to mother, and then — oh, it was horrible! Something had me by the tail and it rattled savagely around my hocks. I made jump after jump to get away from it. I was too frightened to stop at my mother's side, though she called me loudly and came pacing after

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me in much distress. Past her I had darted, for I hoped to outrun the thing at my heels while my mother followed neighing:

“Stop, son, stop — it is nothing!”

But I knew it was something — something awful which I could not outrun, so I ran the harder.

I heard the colt of the White Man yelling and laughing and I flew, nearly crazy. Over hill, through valley, over bush, stone, ditches, and gullies, I went with the dreadful thing giving me the race of my life. I was almost exhausted when I ran through a wild-grape vine and felt an awful savage jerk at my tail that almost threw me down. Not until my mother came up did I know whether my tail had been pulled out by the roots or not. A cropper’s cottage was near by, and a woman with her hand over her eyes was out shouting:

“Reddy — you Reddy-Roost, come here, sah, this minute an’ git yo’ lickin’. I saw you — you tied that tin can to that air colt’s tail.”

I saw Reddy move in another direction and the woman after him with a hickory switch. I was disgusted, for I saw she was not in Reddy’s class, with all that fat on her, and though she gave him a terrible tongue-lashing she did not catch him.

“That was Reddy,” explained my mother, “up to some of his tricks. He is the greatest rascal on the farm, and I intended to warn you to watch out for him. Of course you could n’t help it, for we horses cannot think of but one thing at a time. That is why we run away so often,” and she looked me over to see if I was hurt.

I was n’t, and then she cuffed me with little kicks for being such a fool.

I was panting for breath and too near dead to care much.

## I meet Reddy and My Sire

But I was mad with my mother, too. It is so easy for age to ask *why*, and so hard for youth to answer.

I was miserable and stiff all the afternoon, and my mother was disgusted with me and took more than one occasion to say that I had made a fool and laughing-stock of the whole family.

The old-maid mules especially enjoyed it and said it served me right for having race blood in me.

I was too tired to go to the barn, so mother let me sleep under the trees in the grass. I had gone to sleep, and the moon was just rising when somebody suddenly thrust something in my mouth. I tried to spring up, but there was a warm arm around my neck and an awfully delightful taste in my mouth, and the hand on my nose was petting me. It was Reddy, and he had slipped out and given me a handful of sugar — the first I had tasted — and it was good! And he said he had stolen it from the Big Fat Woman's sugar gourd. It was so good I licked out my tongue, and seeing he was not going to hurt me we became great friends from that time.

"I just wanted to see if you could pace, Hal. Pace? Why, you little son of lightning, you'll set the ground afire some day. And Reddy will be there with his bottom dollar up on you, Hal. Ta-ta! — we'll meet again, and we will not walk home nor chaw anybody's rag!"

"Oh, say!" he laughed, with a final pat, "but I played it on the old woman! That sugar was all she had, but she'll not know it's salt she has got in the gourd until she sweetens her coffee in the morning, an' Reddy'll be a mile away in the field. Ta-ta!"

It was several weeks before I saw my sire. It was early one morning, and the little twinkling water-gems that keep my feet so cool and moist were still shining in the

## The Gift of the Grass

blades of the grass, when I saw a Jolly Fat Man riding up our lane on a handsome long-bodied roan horse, with powerful muscles and clean, long legs and beautiful black mane and tail. I looked at the horse delighted — you could n't help it, he had such an air about him, so earnest and determined, and he carried the Jolly Fat Man on his back as if he were a child.

"Good morning, Captaim," said the Jolly Fat Man, riding up to the rail fence that divided our lot from the road, and talking to Master, who stood nigh. "I am just riding over to the store — thought I 'd see how the election was going on."

The Captain shook hands with him over the fence and called him Colonel Tom.

I noticed that although the roan horse looked so spirited in action, when he stopped Colonel Tom threw one of his fat legs over the pommel of the saddle as if to ease himself and sat talking to the Captain, sidewise. I thought he must have great confidence in the red roan, for if he had moved Colonel Tom would have sat down very sudden in the road.

Mother would n't even look at the roan, but backed her ears every now and then when he looked at her, which I thought was very silly; but I 've learned since that all wedded animals, man as well, seem to have a spite at each other at times, just because, Billy said, "they are yoked together, and can't get loose."

After a while Colonel Tom saw me for the first time and said: "Why, what little runt is that? Is that Lizzie's colt, Captain?"

I dropped my head in shame, but I felt better when I heard Master say: "He 's better than he looks. He 's a pacer and a saddle horse all right. Get off your horse and let me show you how he goes the gait."

## I meet Reddy and My Sire

Colonel Tom hitched his horse to the fence and the two men came toward us.

Up went my head and tail and I stepped mincingly round my mother, who was eyeing me proudly.

"Fox trotting," said Master. "Is n't it natural? He 'll make a saddle horse all right."

Colonel Tom nodded.

"Lor, but he 's so cat-hammed and ewe-necked!"

He clapped his hands, sudden like, to scare me and off I went. I wanted to pace, but I had not forgotten that kicking my mother gave me and I thought I would trot, but I remembered what she said and I mixed them, going a gait between.

"Single-footing," cried Master; "ever see it cleaner, and from just a suckling?" and away I went doing my best.

This tickled Colonel Tom.

"Natural saddler — just what I 've always said. It 's a free season to any man if Tom Hal's colts don't saddle."

I was going fine, making out I was scared at his hand-clapping, but really awfully vain and wanting to show off. I saw my mother looking proudly on. I saw the roan watching me over the fence and down I single-footed by him to show him how I was doing it. Right up to the fence I went, for I saw he was taking notice and had his long neck over the fence so as to see me well. I went single-footing by him, and then, *O Bok!*

Quick and suddenly he reached out, caught me by the neck, lifting me up and shaking me terribly, his hazel yellow eye glaring into mine while he snorted in his horse way:

*"Pace, you little fool! Stick to your gait! You were bred to pace! Stick to your gait!"*

Then he dropped me limp and breathless. My mother rushed at him, her ears laid back and fighting mad;

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but he withdrew his head over the fence, and though she blistered him in the good old wife way, he only cocked one leg and appeared to be looking away off over the hills.

I limped off, all the starch out of me, when he drawled out in his solemn way:

*“Stick to your gait, I say, and never fight a cripple, kiss a fool, or talk back at a female.”*

For which my mother blisters him again, and Colonel Tom laughs at my predicament, mounts him, and rides off.

Some time after this my sire sent me a clean, neatly rolled corn-shuck marked with a few prints of horse teeth, making indentures very plain to me. It was a letter from him, and I prized it highly.

Here I must explain that horses are not like men, neither is their writing like that of the Great White. We have a language, as I said, of only a few sounds, but expressing much according as we say it. And from our birth we know it. So with our written language; it is only a few prints of the writer's teeth on a shuck, but it is the smell that counts, each horse having a thousand different odors that may be put upon the shuck, and which we instantly interpret. As we see best with our nose, as I explained before, so do we read best with our nose, it being so very acute that we know the difference between all the odors found in a shuck and every one expresses a different thought. This shuck was full of many fine scents which I read instantly, and it did me much good and was so helpful to me in after life.

### HORSE SENSE, BY TOM HAL

To the son, much delighted of my heart, Hal:

Stick to thy gait!

Happy is he who hath found for life his gait and his

## I meet Reddy and My Sire

Jonah; that he may cleave to one as to the goal of all good and may avoid the other as the gates of Hulee. Stick to thy gait!

Mix not the gait thou wast born with; for in the mixing of gaits, as of drinks, there is woe. Stick to thy gait!

The mixed gaited are many in the land. They compete and their lot is hard. By day they carry fools on their backs and beneath are saddle-sores. By night they carry slaves and their mouth is broken, their lips cut. Stick to thy gait.

But of the pure gaited there are few in the land, and when he cometh with knowledge and purpose, with fire and the whirlwind's breath, verily he shall stand before Kings; he shall eat of the oats of the mighty. Stick to thy gait!

(Signed) Thy Sire,

TOM HAL.

## CHAPTER IX

### JUNE DAYS

MOTHER said the days were June days, the lush and leaf-swaying days which followed. Our daily current kept changing now south, now southwest, bringing such beautiful reading to my nose. On the June grass, under the beeches, I would lie upon the slope of the hill, plunging my nose upward into the air, quivering with a thousand June scents, pulsing with a thousand June odors, the faintest of which came to me as clear as the odor of a wind-blown rose. And I have thought it would please if I should tell how it seemed to me, reading it as man cannot.

It began with the first opening of my eyes, in the dew-wet wing of birds scattering fluttered odors to the breeze, and the cool, pungent tang of the wild thyme, brushed by a rabbit gliding beneath, or the dank whiff of mint and pennyroyal floating up from the moist places as wine to my very nostrils. And with them the songs of a thousand birds!

Over in the orchard the current told me that June apples were musking to mellowness from boughs where leaves were aromatic with dew and moisture, or peaches, pouring a perfumed path of honey-rich fragrance across the valleys to the noses of distant hives, a daylight path of fragrance, even as the night's path of the milky ways shining in thin-girdling, white currents across the world above. From zone to zone the June day would stand above

## June Days

me, waist deep in the blue waves of the sky, or, nooning on the beeches of the white tide-marked clouds, lie dozing with feet dangling to blue-slippered hills.

I knew at mid-day where the mowers were, from the faint odor of the meshed wheat-heads, falling beneath the blades and giving to the passing wind the delicate breath of their dying song.

While rollicking in their wake like let-out schoolboys, a mile away and across the distant meadow would come the rank, jolly, shouting children with the odor of the fresh cut haystacks, curing in the noon sun.

Mother and I would stand under the great low-limbed trees in the dark, cool shadows where the flies dared not come to annoy us, and watch the horses, three abreast, whirl the staccato-cackling mower through the breasting stalks of the myriad-kingdom wheat, and see the little wheat men go down in swaths and rows before the forked blades of death.

There is no color, neither of earth nor of the sky, as beautiful as the color of a vast valley of ripened wheat, over which a June sun lingers until, looking deeply, one may trace faint backgrounds of crimson above the gold and amber, and straw beneath. And around the field, as the great clattering-tongued machine would whirl, would flash a swath of paleness, as the sturdy, sweet men of the wheat-files quivered, reeled, and turned ashen in their dying. And seeing it, my heart quivered with them; and lying down that I might see them die no longer, still could I hear the clattering tongues of the mowers in one roll of their batteries around the field. But oh, the sweetness of the wheat's dying breath! It is unmatched by the odor of men. We call it the perfume of Those Who Gladly Die.

And there throbbed in me through these June days of

## The Gift of the Grass

doing the joy of living — joy, and that other and greater delight wherein of words to tell it I have not; but it is that far-reaching feeling and quick uplifting which we know only in our heart, telling us this is Life and We are a part of it, Life — which ever was and forever will be — seeing which and being which we will ever be a part.

Because the Gift has been given — how or why we know not — but in the Justice and Balance of Things the Great Giver will never take back his Gift.

O June days — June days! Thus did they seem to me, from the sun's birth in the first pink tops of the morning hills, to his death in the gloom of the purple-peaked evening — a great whirling circle of light and life, bringing each moment new sights, new odors, new tastes: one shimmering wave of plenty, one roll of birdsong, one stream of odors in oneness, one flash of colors across the fields as if the rainbow we saw so often at sunset had fallen during the night and lay tangled across the morning hills.

But what pleased me most was the far-off crests of the distant blue hills turned into swaths of emerald by the rustling lush of the stalwart young corn, splendid in their ranks and battalions, like the cruel armies of men, dressed in green and forever lashing and threshing the air in their succulent strength of growing youth and desire to do.

*Ho! Ho! Comrades! Higher—higher!* the long lines would shout from one hill, waving their green arms upward to the sky.

And *Ho! Ho! Comrades! Higher—higher!* would come the volleying answer back, across the purpling valley, from the massed columns on another hill, still higher encamped, upon the very rim of the sky line and the noon.

But ever and always with them it was, *Comrades!* *Higher! higher!*

## June Days

Easy for me to read were all of their signs and language so sweetly writ on the pages of my current, and beautiful to me were the desires of their heart, their stalwart lustiness to grow, their great desire to know what lay ever beyond.

For they echoed it in the morning with the first rattling breeze, and though they ceased and slumbered toward noon, in the drowsy stillness of the darting heat-waves that made the whole bright valley quiver from hill to hill like great blue looms, with their threads of shimmering light in needles of fire, they would awaken again in the first cool call of the breezes' evening edition, and under the trembling shadows of twilight I could easily hear their good-night hymn.

I was reading nature that June day when up from the lane stretching downward like the long, dark stroke of a painter's brush came two people on horseback.

Instantly I recognized Satin Slipper, the little Tuckapaw pony-mare which Milly May rode, and with her was Mr. Nettles, ever so gallant and talking so charmingly, as he could when he tried.

I sprang up from the grass, where under a great beech I had been lying, and strode with my tail out and my neck up, to the fence near the lane so that Milly May might see how great I had grown.

Down from her pony she leaped at sight of me (as I knew she would), and, though Mr. Nettles laughed and good-naturedly guyed her, she climbed lightly and prettily over the fence and came to me feeling in her pocket for an apple.

Mother came up to share her petting and apples, and Mr. Nettles, seeing she was going to be in no hurry, hitched his horse and vaulted over the fence.

"How he does grow!" said Milly May delightedly as

## The Gift of the Grass

she fondled me and stood by my side measuring my height against her own charming self.

“Why,” said Mr. Nettles, “he has grown into a good, lusty colt. But growth don’t count in that kind,” he teased Milly May; “the more there is of them the worse.”

But Milly May, as usual, held her own, and from the way she laughed and guyed Mr. Nettles about his trotters which could not trot, I saw that they had made up their quarrel of that first day. And I never saw Mr. Nettles so nice, even to me and Mother, and I heard that he had even quit drinking as he used to, and I knew instantly that he was on the best of behavior, because now that Jack was out of the way he hoped to win Milly May.

And this gave me sorrow, for I saw that he cared for her very much — that he watched her delightedly, and at times I saw that light in his eyes that meant danger to any one else who cared for her.

I knew the little flattery he gave me now and then was only to please Milly May. I knew he was now a dangerous rival of Jack, because he was handsome and talented, and charming when he wanted to be.

They were still talking when out of the wooded path strode Jack in his hunting coat and with a small squirrel rifle on his shoulder. He was on us before we saw him — even before he saw us.

He stopped as if undecided, then flushed.

“Good morning,” he said, raising his cap, but looking hard at Mr. Nettles.

“Good morning,” returned Mr. Nettles, with a little friendly smile which seemed to say, “*Oh, I have no ill will now. You can see why I am satisfied!*”

Milly May pretended not to see Jack and stooped with her face over me.

## June Days

For a moment Jack stood, pale to his lips and with a look of the game thing cut to the vitals.

Then he turned and strode on.

"I think you might have spoken to him," said Mr. Nettles.

"After my promise not to do so?" she said, looking up; and I saw her face was white and sad, and the corners of her mouth, despite the little laugh she tried to make, betraying her.

"Oh, but it's all right with him now," said Nettles. "Now since *we*—"

"But I have n't said—I have n't said"—and I saw her voice trembled to a quiver.

"I did n't mean to hurt you," said Nettles, coming closer. "I am such a fool about you—I—"

But Milly May was looking over the path which Jack had taken.

"Oh, yes, I'd speak to him now—really I am not uneasy."

Milly May flushed up.

"Speak to him? Do you think I would, after what you told me?"

"Oh, well, I would n't be hard on him," laughed Nettles.

"We poor fellows are only mortals, and they say she *is* a pretty girl."

Milly May flushed and I saw the faintest sign of tears in her eyes.

"And besides," went on Nettles, "I don't know that they are engaged. I know he is devoted to her and—"

"I hate him!" cried Milly May, stamping her foot and flashing her eyes down the path Jack had taken.

Nettles laughed. "Oh, he is a pretty good fellow," he said. "Like all of us, he can't help falling in love with a real pretty one."

## The Gift of the Grass

But Milly May was already over the rail fence. Nor did she notice me or say good-by.

But in the saddle she turned Satin Slippers' head homeward.

"I have a headache and I am going back home," she said determinedly. "You go on to the post-office, please," and before Nettles could protest she had galloped off.

## CHAPTER X

KITTY McCREA

It was in midsummer when I next saw Milly May. The Captain gave what the White Men called a barbecue, and Milly May and Jack among many others were there.

I heard of this barbecue weeks before it occurred, chiefly from the mighty wailing and mourning of the sheep who would bleat their death hymns every night in the moonlight when they saw the pit being dug and the wood being cut for their fire, and the sawdust being spread under the trees for the dancing.

It was depressing to hear these sheep, and pitiful, too, knowing as I did that some of their flock would be killed, as Billy said grandiloquently and satirically, "to make a White Man's holiday!"

"Oh, listen to the Baa-Baa people," said Billy disgustedly. "Of course a few of them will be butchered for the Great White Man, for he is the greatest of all our carnivorous animals, and this barbecue is his word for roasting and eating us from head to tail. He will also take a few of my wives and sons; but," he added significantly, "there are others, and may be still more! And why may he not eat us? Once he was animal enough to eat his own kind, but has developed up to this—the eating of other animals—by feeding his brain with the food of the lower. Bok made the world and the laws thereof, and the law of all life is merely a scale of death, a ladder of shambles, steps from stomach to stomach, wherein, from protoplasm to man, they devour each other

## The Gift of the Grass

in accordance with the scale of the predominance of gray matter in the brain. Where would we be if it were not for this? If man stopped eating us or using our hides for his comfort, we had never been.

"I for one prefer to have been, whatever my fate, knowing that I am a small cog fitting into the great unknown Wheel of Things. Just so is man, and by the same fate as mine Death takes him at last, and by his own creed," laughed Billy, "*all but a few of The Chosen, at last, are roasted from beard to tail over his Devil's pit!*

"Bah! Let the silly sheep wail! They had better thank Bok they are permitted to fit into the Wheel of Things even if they do have to suffer death.

"For what is death, even if it ends us, to the glory of having lived?

"And if we die for good, are n't we a lifetime ahead of the game?"

And he went after pennyroyal.

I greatly enjoyed the barbecue, for Milly May was there and so was Jack. But it was strange the way Milly May acted, for true to her promise to her father she would not speak to Jack. At first Jack was hurt; then he ignored Milly May. There was a fine White Woman from town, with painted cheeks and many feathers, and Jack danced with her all day, and Milly May, just as proud, danced with Mr. Nettles.

Toward the afternoon Milly May slipped down alone to the spring to get some water, and seeing me she slipped into the woods where I was watching the Great Whites' frolic and threw her arms around my neck, and I felt tears run on my back.

"Hal, little Hal, I am going away to school, and when I come back I shall marry a man I do not love — for Jack loves me no longer."

## Kitty McCrea

But I saw a little thing that touched the sad spot in me, horse that I am.

It was the great yearning, pleading eyes of Kitty McCrea (who I learned was Reddy's sister, though Reddy called her Birdie, because she sang like a bird). And being too poor to have a gown she would slip up and watch the gayety from a clump of trees near me, her great eyes and slender ankles and graceful form reminding me of a deer.

I had seen her before, though not closely, and I had heard her often; for when not at work in the fields with her father and Reddy, she would be out in the woods imitating the songs of the birds. And such a voice! There was not a bird that she could not imitate, carrying the notes so true sometimes that I often mistook her for the great, long, gray mocking-bird that sang for us each morning.

She was still watching the dancing when I saw Mr. Nettles going alone to the spring for water. At the sight of the girl he stopped, and into his face flashed that well-mannered, winning smile he knew so well how to handle.

"Why, you wood-nymph — you peach," he said, jokingly and laughing and coming up on her so suddenly that she had no chance to run, "who are you and where did you come from?"

She stepped around the tree like a wood sprite. Then I saw her turn crimson as she looked at her short, torn frock, only half concealing her bare ankles, and then she sat down in the grass, hiding them and saying:

"Oh, please go away — I — I — don't know you."

"Oh, that's all right," said Nettles, coming up and sitting down by her. "I am sure we shall be good friends," and he looked her over as brazenly as if she had been a horse.

## The Gift of the Grass

She hid her face, saying again:

“Oh, please go away — and let me go home.”

“Where do you live?” he asked.

She pointed to the log cabin on the wooded slope of the hill.

“Phew! As pretty a thing as you in that hole?”

His eyes seemed to devour the slender thing beside him and he glanced toward the crowd, saying:

“Why don’t you come also?”

Kitty shook her head and said nothing.

“You had no gown?” he asked, glancing down at her sorry dress.

She nodded her head like a child — and could not talk.

Then she said:

“But if I had it, it would not be for *that*,” and she nodded toward the sounds of music.

“Not for *that*? Then what?” smiled Nettles.

She looked up into his face excitedly — so interested that all her timidity had fled. “Just to go to school. It begins next week — just to learn, for I learn so easily and so fast,” she said naively.

“Oh, you do,” laughed Nettles.

“Yes, and to sing — you ought to hear me sing.”

“Let me hear you sing, please,” and he smiled, half amused.

“Oh, I don’t sing like other people; that is, I don’t sing real songs like ‘I ’ll Remember You, Love, in My Prayers,’ and all that. I just imitate the birds. Why, I can make a red-bird ashamed of himself! I don’t mean that little old *tweet tweet* sound he makes in the bushes when he’s dodging around trying to hide himself, but I mean the pretty song he sings when he’s mating, and says, ‘*Good cheer — good cheer — good cheer*,’ and a lot more,” and she said it so like a bird that Nettles laughed.

## Kitty McCrea

“Why, I thought it was a Kentucky cardinal,” he said.

“But there’s one that’s got me beat yet, and it’s that there mocking-bird, though I’ll fix him yet! For, as I said, it ain’t words we sing — it’s the voice and the making up of the words.”

“And you want some clothes so that you can go to school and learn how the birds sing,” he said, breaking in on her as he glanced at his watch.

“Oh, no,” she said, “the singin’ is natural. I’ll learn that from the birds. But I do need the book learning so; why, I’m sixteen now and ever so smart for my age,” she said earnestly again.

“Say, I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said Nettles, rising and glancing at his watch again. “I’ll send you the shoes and stockings and the gown to-morrow so you can go to school —”

“Now since the crop is laid by —” she added eagerly, following him with wonder-interested eyes.

“Now since the crop is laid by,” he smiled, “if you’ll let me be your good friend;” and he came closer — “and give me a kiss now to seal it.”

“You sure don’t mean *that*?” she cried, jumping up impulsively again, “and shoes and stockings and a chance for school, all for one kiss when my mouth’s just made of ‘em? Will I do it? — just watch me,” and before Nettles could catch his breath she jumped up, threw two half-bare arms around his neck and kissed him as a child would a pet dog.

Nettles blushed crimson, then pale, as he glanced around to see if they had been seen.

“Wait!” he said, drawing her to him again and kissing her passionately — “Wait!”

But she had drawn back, her eyes lowered and crimson flushes mounting up to her hair. Tears, too, sprang into

## The Gift of the Grass

her eyes, and, backing off behind the bushes, she kept saying, "I — I did n't know you cared if anybody saw! I — I did n't know it — it — would make me ashamed, too" — and she darted off, half defiantly, toward the cabin.

Nettles had seen no one, but if he had been able to see as well as I can smell, he would have seen the great, cruel *Maestremare*, or stepmother, watching them with scowling face from a plum thicket near the cabin. And had he been nearer he would have heard her say:

"The little huzzy! I knew she was mean, but I never knowed she had *that* kind of meanness in her! The little baggage! Well, I 'll beat it out of her the first chance I get. I 'll beat it out or I 'll break her neck."

Nettles watched Kitty, strangely interested — his face still flushed, his eyes following her as I have seen the Great White Hunter's eyes look at the vanishing deer:

"Beautiful," he said, "beautiful, and as unknowing as a wild bird. What a stunning thing she will grow into! And living in that hole!"

He turned on his heel: "I 'll send her the things in the morning. She 's old Cropper McCrea's daughter."

And the next morning Kitty had them on, beautiful shoes and a comely gown that made her look more beautiful even in her wild way, than Milly May. And her very good looks made her more timid and more like the lady that Milly May was.

Then I heard Reddy talking to her: "Birdie, you made a mash on that fellow Nettles. He 's the Squire's partner."

And then Reddy scratched his tangled red hair and seemed to be thinking: "But I don't know," he went on, "that we ought to take his clothes. I 'm wondering what our dead mammy would say — her that you say used to love us."

But Kitty looked proudly at herself and said:

## Kitty McCrea

"O, Reddy, he 's our good prince. He said so himself this morning. Why, you orter seen him bow when he saw me — taking off his hat, *so!*!" and laughing, she made Reddy a mock bow, her face flushed and pleased.

For the first time in his life I saw that Reddy was thinking hard.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CHILDREN IN THE WOODS

I LEARNED that she of the Great Whites, who had chased Reddy, was his stepmother and the wife of Reddy's father, a poor cropper on the Captain's farm. This man did not seem to me to have any spirit, being stooped as to his back, with red, straggling hair on his face, and grimy stains of tobacco running from the corners of his mouth. And though his wife was ever abusing him, he never replied except to grunt and shuffle along at what he was doing. Billy said he was henpecked, or what we call *maremastered* (which is a better word), and had worked so hard all his life bending his back to the plough and the hoe, that the man-spirit had gone from him and he was now little more than a beast of the field.

But if my first master was cruel, this woman was worse. She had a savage temper, and when not tongue-lashing her husband or working (as no horse in our barn ever drudged — for that was her religion), she was cruelly treating Reddy and his sister, Kitty McCrea, they being, as I said, her stepchildren, or what we horses call *pony-cuffers* — motherless colts.

I had seen Kitty McCrea at a distance, as I said, all summer, and I heard Reddy talking about her, she being the only thing that Reddy seemed to love very greatly, and his devotion to her was tender. For Reddy played with me every day, slipping off from his work of minding

## The Children in the Woods

the cows or hoeing corn, to fondle me and divide with me the things he had in his pocket, which were generally the earliest ripened apples and peaches and in the fall sweet pawpaws and chestnuts. And there were never better friends than Reddy and I, though he would play his tricks upon me now and then. For he was what we horses call a *nag-knower*, being one who naturally knows a horse by instinct. And so was Kitty — even more than Reddy. Kitty was much like Reddy, though older, being a comely girl of about sixteen grass-times, according to the counting of horses. And she was full of the spirit of daring things, quick and without thought, and most headstrong when started, and like a boy in the doing. But her lot was hard, for day after day I saw her working in the corn field with her shuffling, tobacco-chewing sire, and often by looking through the fence I could see her, a slim, stooping, sad-eyed girl, leaning upon her hoe amid the hot, half-grown corn, pushing back with slim, tapering hands her heavy plaits of rich, red-brown hair from under her bonnet, her pretty white ankles and feet concealed with the dust the hoe had stirred up. And then I would love to look at her, for underneath her bonnet her two dreamy dark eyes would look and linger sadly towards the hills as if she wondered what was beyond them.

And by her eyes I could see she was tired and heart-broken — she, such a fair daughter of the Great White, doing the work of a mule!

I did not wonder when I heard she was wild and would run away from home when her mammy beat her.

But I never knew how hard a lot was hers till the night I heard her screaming and begging the woman whom she and Reddy called mammy not to beat her any more. Her cries were so pitiful that I rushed down to the fence where the cropper's cabin stood, neighing and fretting

## The Gift of the Grass

so that my mother came pacing after me, calling me to mind my own business.

And then I saw the terrible, frenzied Great Woman of the Whites, beating this frail thing of her own race, while the shuffling White One only looked on with bowed head. But I saw Reddy rush in and seize her cruel stick, and though she turned it on him, he fought with her as best his strength permitted, while Kitty fled out into the night to the woods, sobbing like the homeless one she was. And how I did glory in Reddy's grit, for he stood up under her cursing and blows and cursed her back in the braggart bluffing of the man of his race, until, dodging around and around her, he dived for her legs and tripped her into a heap, sprawling!

Then he darted out after Kitty, but taking time to slip the top plank from the steps, and the Great Virago, or what we call *maestremare*, ran after him until she slipped on the step (which was only a hole where a step once was) and went a somersault over, knocking down an ash-hopper which rolled with her down the hill, until I scampered off, not knowing which was which and how soon it would come over the fence.

But I knew afterwards she was badly hurt which, whether wrong or not, certainly made me glad.

For she swore she would kill them both the next day when she caught them.

And then it was that the motherless ones slept near me that night, Reddy having bathed his sister's face, where the blood was, until she looked more beautiful than ever. Then he had her walk in the cool, deep holes of the creek to try to make the ugly whelks go off her pretty limbs. And not while I live shall I forget that scene, she looking so like a fairy and her feet twinkling in the water. Never had I seen so beautiful a creature, nor one my

## The Children in the Woods

heart went out to so strongly. I followed her around, nosing her, her hair and dress, and she forgot all about her beating and laughed and petted me and told Reddy that when I grew a little bigger she was going to be the first one to ride me.

Then she sat down on the leaves Reddy had piled up for them to sleep on, and talked to him about her mother (whom she remembered but Reddy did n't) and how sweet it was to have a real mother who loved you and did not beat you, who kissed you every night when she put you to bed.

"Birdie," said Reddy, "you know you are joking — there ain't no such mothers like that, is there?"

Which touched me, for I knew that Reddy, who never had a real mother, had not had the chance which I, a horse, had had.

And so, talking about their mother, and wondering which star up in the sky she lived in, and if she were not somehow watching over them, they went to sleep snuggled together in the leaves, their arms around each other.

And then I had to chuckle at my mother. She had heard all they said, and though she very sternly reprimanded me for meddling in the affairs of the Great Whites, the sight of these two motherless children, driven into the woods, yet having not even the care of dumb beasts (owing to the cruelty and injustice of their breed), was too much for her.

All night long I saw her standing over them, keeping guard.

I knew then that the spirit of motherhood is in all animals.

Just after daylight, when the children were still asleep, snug among the leaves of the soft grass beneath the low-bending limbs of the beech, and the sun was beginning

## The Gift of the Grass

to paint the sky in that pretty way he has, and which we, who see it daily, learn to look for (knowing it shall mean a fair day), there came along two men through the pasture and the woodlot from the Captain's house. When they drew near I smelt that one was the Captain and the other was a very young man of very broad shoulders, with a swinging, bold way of going, and a strong quietness in his face, which was stern. They were talking about opening the fall school in the little log schoolhouse which sat amid the trees by the big spring in the woodlot of our pasture. I had seen this little house sitting there all summer, the weeds rank and high around it, its windows closed and all looking very desolate; and I had thought what a fine stable it would make for my mother and me. But she told me it was a place where the children of the Great White would come by and by and sit all day on hard benches, "the fools of them," she said, "to become greater fools, and the wise to learn more wisdom."

When they reached us the Quiet Stern One stopped and stood looking puzzled into the bed of leaves where Reddy and Kitty lay, and as he looked the stern lines around his mouth stretched into kindly smiles.

"What is it, Douglas?" said the Captain, stopping and looking.

"I would say babes in the woods for a good guess," said the young man, still trying to make it out and going closer. Then I saw him stop, and that quiet tenderness creep into his face again, for it was a pretty and touching sight. Reddy had piled the leaves over Kitty till only her pretty face and hair were out, and when she sat up at the sound of voices and came out of her bed of leaves, they falling around her like flowers and some clinging to her hair, she looked like a beautiful wild thing from another land. There was an ugly cut across her face and others

## The Children in the Woods

on her limbs, which she tried to hide by kind of courtesy-ing like and stooping, flushing red to her temples.

The Captain stood, looking astonished, and the young man in pity and himself flushing, until Kitty, to hide her shame, dropped into the leaves again and covered her face with her hands.

“They are McCrea’s children,” said the Captain, pointing to the cabin in the woods.

“How came you here, Reddy?” he asked, for Reddy had waked up and was looking, half sleepy, around. Then Reddy told him very fast, and getting excited again, he tried to tell of their beating, but could only point to his sister’s bruises and her whelked legs, and then the shamed manhood in him overcame him and he wept. (He did not know it, but one of his eyes looked like a bruised pawpaw and there was a tremendous bump on the brow above.)

“And you two children slept out here?” said the Captain, and I could see he was mad. “Why did n’t you come to my house?”

“Oh, we slept fine,” said Reddy; “but we’re not going back — that is, not Birdie there,” he said determinedly, pointing to the girl in the grass.

“I can stand it,” he went on; “beating only makes me grow and a good fighter; but Birdie — Birdie, well, now she’s different.”

“I am just as good a fighter as you, Reddy,” said Kitty, looking up seriously and forgetting to cry. “She’s never conquered me yet.”

“Oh, you think you are,” said Reddy, soothingly, “but you let her get the underholt on you every time, you can’t dodge and keep out of her way and you don’t know a thing about the blacksnake trip and the billy goat butt for her stomach! An’ I’ve told you and told you and

## The Gift of the Grass

*told* you that, and how her stomach was the biggest and weakest pint, an' you never will learn to butt in and do the trick."

"Well, I 'll do it the next time, Reddy, see if I don't," she said, indignantly.

"They ain't going to be no nex' time," said Reddy, resolutely. "You ain't goin' back."

The young man could n't keep his eyes off of Kitty, and his face would keep changing from the stern lines to the tender ones and sadness mixed. He and the Captain talked a little and the Captain said kindly to them:

"Come, go back to the cabin with us. I want to see your father. If he can't protect his children, I 'll do it myself. I 'll have no such cruelty as this on my farin'."

But even as he spoke we saw the shuffling one coming along (the sun being now over the rim of things), carrying upon his stooped shoulders a heavy plough and going to the field to work. When near us the Captain spoke to him sharply.

Very deliberately he stopped and turned towards us, his plough righting slowly like the antlers of a great deer sniffing the wind. Then the reddish, hairy face between the handles puckered as it spat out tobacco, and from it came:

"Mornin', gentlemen!"

"Put down your plough, Mac," said the Captain, kindly, "I want to talk to you."

Very slowly the great horns came round as he fetched it to the ground with a grunt and a long whistling sigh.

"Gentlemen — at yo' sarvice!"

"Are these your children?" asked the Captain, sharply.

Very deliberately he spat before he answered.

"I 've allers heurd tell they was. They mammy, my fus' wife, said they was, an' I allers thought she knewed."

## The Children in the Woods

The Captain flushed impatiently, but the shuffling one scarcely saw us as his indifferent eyes glanced around. More like a hunted wild thing he seemed than a Great White Man, and I saw that he suspected traps for his destruction had been set.

"Mac," said the Captain, sternly, "do you know these children were cruelly beaten by your wife last night and forced to sleep out here in the leaves with the cattle? They have had no supper, no breakfast —"

The shuffling one glanced cautiously down the lane toward his cabin and whispered aloud:

"Sally — she 's mighty *sivig'rus* — mighty *sivig'rus*!"

"What are you going to do about it?" asked the Captain impatiently. "Going to stand that and see it done again?"

"Hev — to!" He spat, and whispered again: "Sally 's mighty *sivig'rus*!"

"What kind of a man are you, Mac?" the Captain asked, hotly.

"A man of peace — a follower of the Lam'" — and he drawled it as one does one's lesson from a book.

"But Sally, she 's mighty — *sivig'rus*!" he said again.

"Now, here," said the Captain, sternly, "just leave Sally out. What are you going to do with these children? They can't, at least this girl shall not, go back to that woman again."

He spat very slowly, as if trying to think. Then turned towards Kitty, who all this time had stood apart, as if she cared not what her fate should be.

"The gal, thar," he said, finally, "kin go on to the field with me, and he'p me with the fall wheat. Gal, I 've got yo' breakfas' here," he said, turning to Kitty and tapping a tin bucket tied to his plough — "an' you kin eat thar in the field. I would n't choose to hev you go down thar now," he went on, wagging his head cautiously

## The Gift of the Grass

towards the cabin, "fur Sally she 's *unduly* sivig'rus this mornin'. She was right smart knocked up las' night an' laid up in bed for a while, with a tarrible sprained shoulder."

"How, dad?" asked Reddy, joyously, trying to hide his enthusiasm.

"She was chasin' a cat after you left," lied the mare-mastered one, "an' fell outen the door."

Reddy chuckled.

"Mac," said the Captain, firmly, "I'll tell you what I am going to do. I am going to take this girl home with me — to my house to live. My wife and I have no children and we are going to see that she has a woman's chance."

At this Kitty sprang up, forgetting her torn frock and bare legs, and coming over to where the Captain stood, she sat down at his feet as a cowed thing would, and wept. The teacher had stood watching Kitty through all this. I could see that his heart had gone to the beautiful, wild thing of the cabin. He came over to her and put one hand on her fluff of sheen-gold hair and said kindly:

"And she shall go to school to me and it shall cost her nothing."

"O Teacher! Teacher! Oh, that 's what I 've wanted all my life!" And Kitty reached up and took his hand in both hers, kissing it, while the young man flushed red and turned away, for his eyes were moist.

And from that day on she called him Teacher.

The shuffling one looked at them as if he half understood them as he strained, grunting and tugging at his plough.

"As you please — as you please, gentlemen. I 'm a man of peace — a follower of the Lam' — an' Sally she is *onduly* sivig'rus this mornin', ter be sho'! She b'longs to the church — it runs in her family." And so, slowly, his

## The Children in the Woods

great plough came to his shoulders and he steered off down the lane.

“Well, Reddy,” said the Captain, turning to him, “now —”

“Oh,” smiled Reddy, “don’t bother about me, long as Birdie’s all right I can stand it anywhere — so long as Birdie’s all right,” he kept saying. “I’ll go back there — you take keer of her. I’ll stay there,” and he winked at the Captain, “as long as the cat’s there for company. Right now I’ll go and he’p the old man,” and kissing Kitty he followed his father.

I had never been up to the Captain’s home (old Jake called it the Big House), so pretending to be hunting for better grass (but really I wanted to see just how happy Kitty would be when she got there and what else would happen), I followed her and the Captain, for the teacher had gone on to open his school. The Big House sat back on the crown on a small blue grass hill with a great stone fence around it, making a pretty lawn of grass and with fine trees scattered about. They went through the gate into the inner yard and I slipped in, Kitty being very demure and quiet and the Captain only breaking the silence once to say, as I followed them in, nosing right up to Kitty, for whom I had formed a great feeling of closeness, and this he said to me, smiling:

“Well, you certainly have your nerve!”

The Big House greatly impressed me, with its wide porches and stone steps and gleaming red bricks. I saw how much more it meant for Kitty if she could only be reared here in the big-making of things, than in the cabin with its small-making. For my mother said one’s future depended much on those things and she said our horse word for a good, big chance in life was *nag-spanning*.

In the flower yard was a quiet-eyed gentle dame at

## The Gift of the Grass

work among her flowers. She greeted Kitty with a kind smile, and then glancing at her whelked bare legs, the black and bruised cuts on her face, she said, "Oh," very gently and pettishly, at which Kitty sat down in the grass and began to sob, and I knew what made her do it.

That "Oh" and that face brought back the face of her own dead mother.

The Captain talked to his wife (whom he called My Lady Dear) a while apart and then My Lady came up to Kitty and put her arm around her, saying, smilingly:

"Come, you shall be our daughter, Kitty. Ours has passed beyond — she would have been about your age."

Then her face flushed angrily as she looked at Kitty's cuts. "Come," she said, "let me take you in and get my witch-hazel bottle."

"Oh, My Lady, My Lady, this is all too good for me!" cried Kitty.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE SCHOOL IN THE WOODS

BUT more pleasant by far to me was the sight of Kitty going to school every morning with the teacher, whose name was Douglas McKnight. My Lady had gowned her in taste, and with her sheeny golden hair in big plaits around her shoulders and her lithe and comely body, so full of the strength of the field and the grass and the young corn, and her young face shining in the new gladness of the new life, she would walk beside the teacher like the free spirit of those who live after the manner of the children of the woods and the fields.

She called him Teacher, and superhuman he was to her, above all things and as some young god of her fathers.

He was quiet and moved as a great horse, slowly and with much thought.

But after the first day, when I saw how he loved to come and go with Kitty, and how he watched her every movement as they chatted along through the pasture woods and encouraged her to talk to him in her frank, quaint way, I knew that he wished in his heart that Kitty might some day be his own. And not for the world would he have told it — nay, he knew it not himself. But as I said, we have many strange instincts and senses which men have not. It was so plain to me, in his looks, in his quiet ways when he spoke to her, in his wanting to teach her the lessons with their heads close together over the lamp (which, nightly, I could see shining from the open

## The Gift of the Grass

window of the Big House, where he also stayed). His very tenderness and unhappiness made me not only see but smell that he loved her.

And during the school hours I would go right up to the little schoolhouse and watch the children of the Great Whites at their books. To me it was always most interesting and comical. For very hard it seemed for them to learn the things they had to learn, whereas with me I seemed just to *know* my lessons, as they came in life, as naturally as I knew the grass and trees and slopes of the blue hills, as surely as came the wind-scent to my nose and the faint murmur of all nature to my ears under the moonlight nights.

But the little Whites! Oh, it was horse-laughing, or what we call *hippo-hawhaw*, to watch them.

On hard benches they sat, all sizes and all kinds, with different minds and feelings, and some of them willing and bright and full of the desire of knowing, and others dull and sluggish and what we call *hippo-clodders*, or num-skulls, in their language. Some bubbling over with the fun of things and others with their eyes ever upward to the stars. And at their head sat the teacher, stern and solemn, and trying as hard as he could, by the same will and the same books and the same talk, to make all of their minds and souls alike, though no two of them were.

At noon recess the teacher would share his lunch with Kitty (for The Lady would put up their lunches together), and often I would nibble up to them that I might see, and get the bit of sugar or salt Kitty always had for me.

And all the time the other children would be playing around with great shouts and much romping and much laughter, but Kitty, being older and (since the Lady had dressed her so prettily) so much like the grown-up,

## The School in the Woods

would try to be very sedate. And the teacher, strive as he would, could not keep his face turned from Kitty. And she, when she knew, flushed like the face of the east, the morning I saw that beautiful coming up of the sun, and the sheen of her golden hair would ripple as she bent her head that he might not see her confusion, and the lithe full breast of her would rise and fall quickly as one does when, panting in the heat of speed-burst, in the homestretch of the race, with the wire and the purse in sight.

One day she said to him, as they finished their lunch amid the noisy throng, and, like the neat one she was, had folded the napkins and put away the lunch things nicely:

“Do you think that I am learning my books as fast as I might, Teacher? I *do* mean to learn so fast.”

The teacher smiled: “Why, child, you astonish me by your grasp of things — your mind is growing in jumps — like that gourd vine there.”

And he pointed to the porch.

Kitty laughed: “Well, I hope it will not wither as quick. Don’t you remember Jonah’s? My mother taught me to read of him — my mother who died,” she said quickly.

“Do you remember her well?” he asked.

“Oh, so well. I was ten when she died. I am sixteen now. She was far more gifted than Dad — poor Dad — and educated. Her people were fine people in Virginia, and she ran off with Dad to this new land. Oh, but she could sing and play the violin.”

“It is a sad contrast,” said the teacher — “your father’s present wife.”

“Sh-h!” said Kitty, coming closer to him ever so shyly. “We don’t know the plans for life for us. But

## The Gift of the Grass

for her and the beating and that night in the woods, this great happiness — I would never have had it!"

"And are you really as happy here as you think?" he asked, looking at her very steadily. "Would n't you be as happy in any other school? You may advance so much faster than these," he said, pointing to the children, "that I shall have to send you to the high school."

"Happiness is all in the thought," said Kitty, wisely, "and oh, please don't say anything about my leaving you — please — " and she came up beside him and looked down at him with eyes wet.

The young man looked away. Then he said:

"Don't look at me that way — I can't stand it — I see you again as I saw you that first time — thrown out on the world and in the woods."

He arose and left her. She followed him with the fine yearning eyes she had, then a great smile broke into them and she sprang up and rushed over where the children were dancing to rope, and I saw her pretty feet flying to the flip and skip of it.

It was late that afternoon, the sun was shining warm against the schoolhouse, and standing by the little window near Kitty's desk, I was nodding sleepily. For the sleepy, humdrum noise of the school had got into my brains. I heard a woodpecker hammering his *rattle-rattle-to-rat* on the schoolhouse gable. I saw the sleepy children nodding over their books, who, catching the teacher's eye, would wiggle up straight and work mouthingly their little lips, as if spelling out their words. Then the woodpecker would rattle again against the boards, the humdrum came steadily out whiffing to my acute nose with a thousand smells of the schoolhouse — of faces that needed washing, of little hot heads and sweaty bodies, of left-over lunches slyly munched while teacher was not looking, and that

## The School in the Woods

indefinable smell (to my nose) of the brat who would spit on his slate to rub off his sum, and smear it over with the palm of his fat, dirty hand!

I was nodding, reading all these smells as easily as an open book, and wondering why the Great Whites would not learn that open air was healthful and the smell that did n't smell at all was nature's smell of purity, when a pretty thing happened that almost made me laugh.

Kitty being the largest girl in school sat at a desk alone, by the window.

Twice had she slipped me bits of a cracker and all the time I saw how her eyes had the far-away yearning in them of old — that look she used to give the hills when she worked, tired and hot, amid the corn, as if wondering what lay beyond.

Now she sat at her desk, very quiet and yet so yearning as to her eyes. I was nodding in the humdrum of it all, when I was awakened by a short sob coming out to my ears, and I smelt the salt tears of Kitty in distress. I looked. She sat bowed over her desk — her face buried in her arms.

All the little humdrummers were awake instantly. All looked wonderingly at Kitty.

Very quietly the teacher came over to her, and stood by her desk. But she would not look up.

“Kitty,” he said aloud, and sternly, as if for discipline, “you are disturbing the school; why do you do this?”

But she only sobbed shamedly the more, and he said again, with feigned sternness:

“This, you know, is against the rules. You must remain in, after school, for punishment.”

Very sternly he said it, and when he had finished with his class and the children had filed out with shouts and hurrying feet for the path home through the woods, still

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Kitty sat sobbing quietly at her seat. The laugh and shout of the children had followed them through the woods. The woodpecker, frightened, had fled. The stillness in the little school was being broken only by Kitty's sob. The teacher went over to her desk and sat down by her.

"Tell me what it is, Kitty," he said, kindly. "You may trust me, your friend. Who has mistreated you? Who has hurt you?"

Then very sweetly and with all her quaint frankness, she looked up in his face and said:

"Oh, you will despise me — you will despise me — but, Teacher — oh, it is weak and foolish of me, but — but it is *just because I love you so!*"

White to the lips went the strong, fine mouth, then red to the temples of his fine, strong head. Bending low over her he kissed the hot, wet cheeks and whispered:

"Be not ashamed of it, for I also love you. Come, now, be happy in it and let us go home."

And Kitty, looked up laughing through her tears, and said: "You said you would punish me — but this is such — sweet — punishment!"

It was several days after this when I met Mr. Nettles driving quietly in his cart to the door of the cabin of the cropper. As he passed the field I could see he was looking to see where Kitty was, and not seeing her at work, very cautiously he drove around through the woods to the cabin. There was no reply to his call, and hitching his horse he went into the house.

I knew who was in there; the great *maestremare* was in there buttressed on her back with a broken shoulder, and I bethought it would be fun to hear the tongue-lashing she would give Nettles, so I sidled down to the fence and watched. And very gallant was Mr. Nettles when he found whom he had run in on.

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"Oh, Madam," he said, "I hope I do not intrude. But I was looking for your little girl. I have taken a great fancy to her, and wish to send her to school."

Then the big *maestremare* sat up in bed and poured out her curses against the girl:

"She ain't here," she said. "She has run away to live with the quality," she sneered; "she — the hussy! Ay, but I beat her soundly before she did — the baggage! Left me here on my back with a broken shoulder, too."

"She should not have done that," said Nettles, sympathetically. "She should be made to return. Where has she gone?"

The woman nodded her head towards the Big House.

Nettles looked worried.

"Of course it is no affair of mine," he said, "but she should be made to return. Why did you beat her?"

For a moment the woman looked at him with a strange, hard smile on her face.

"Now say," she said, "I 'm po' but my stock is straight. None of our women have ever gone to the bad. I b'long to the church — it runs in my family. We 're po' but we 're virtuous. Our virtue is all we'uns got. That air our religion. Did n't I see her brazenness in the woods with you? Did n't you send her clothes the next day? Hey?" she added hoarsely. "Ain't *you* the man?"

"Now," said Nettles, getting up suddenly and going up to her bed. "I hope you will not misjudge her for that; she was but a child and knows no wrong. I assure you I am interested in her only for her good. You are a good woman, I am sure," he said, and he slipped a bill into her hand. "You will need things when you get up, and I hope you will not talk of that — she is unfortunate enough as it is — you would ruin her," he added.

The woman only grinned meaningly.

## The Gift of the Grass

"Wal, she 'll not leave me for no quality — no — she 'll come back here and do her part of the work; she 'll not be set up over her betters. Just wait till I can walk up to that house and see what the quality will do when they knows what kind of a baggage they have adopted. Ha-ha — she 'll be back here in a jiffy, she will."

"I would n't do that," said Nettles, quickly. "You will ruin her — in this gossiping little town."

"And it might spoil some plans of yours in another direction," said the woman with a bitter laugh. "Oh, yes, it mout."

Nettles' color came and I saw the woman had touched the one thing he was trying to hide.

"Oh," he said, "come now, dear Madam — you are a good woman. Think what it means to spread such a story on a young girl. It was my fault — I 'll admit it, she was so young, and she did no real wrong. Now here, you will need some —"

"Go 'way," said the woman, angrily. "Go 'way and let me be. I 'd rather get even with that hussy than to have all your money. Just wait till I can walk. I 'm virtuous — and I b'longs to the church — it runs in my family, an' I 'll have her back here at the wash-tub and in the plough-furrow for that."

Nettles started to the door, very angry, but saying nothing. The woman sat up again in bed.

"But say," she said, stopping him, "as I said, she 'll soon be back here, then — wal, then you drop in any day with your money and things, and *give 'em to me* next time; she 'll belong to me. She 'll belong to a virtuous 'oman — one as b'longs to the church — yes —" and she lay back and laughed.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RAID OF THE BLOODLETTERS

ONE night in the early fall when the wind, stirring the leaves above my head, began to feel cool and crisp to the blood, I heard my mother talking to Dinkey's dam across the road about the big fair soon to come off. She was a little Texas mare, called Panhandle Pearl, with a brand on her hip.

"Are you going?" she asked mother.

"I should say so," said mother. "I have never missed one yet. All blooded horses go."

"I am pretty good blood myself," said Pearl, while Dinkey made a face at me through the fence and winked knowingly.

Mother sniffed contemptuously. "Look at that brand on your hip and that mule colt by your side! Either of them would bar you from good society."

Pearl looked very much perturbed over this and walked off very meekly, promising to do better in her mating.

I felt sorry for her and Dinkey until I saw how brazen she was, for at the other end of the pasture she kissed the Kunnel Sah over the fence, while the old Kunnel Sah in his most fetching ways was telling her how lovely she was!

"That," said my mother disgustedly, "is why there is so little good blood in the world. Those Western wenches would soon ruin our stock. I'd like to see any of *her* blood take a blue ribbon! It's the grass, my son — the grass. The coarse prairie stuff gets into their bones and blood — yes, and their morals."

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The next day the Captain had my mother shod and began to feed her grain at night and morning and to have old Jake rub her off. Sometimes, too, he would ride her, leaving me alone for an hour or more, during which I would slip off and play with Dinkey and he taught me a new and naughty trick, but such a jolly trip each time!

I was now a lusty colt, full of hot blood, and though I was roached as to my back and sloping as to my rump and hock, still my head was neatly turned, and I had one other good trait, for I heard my mother say more than once:

“Hal is not very pretty, it is true, nor very smart; nor, I am sorry to say, very good, *but he is an awful healthy colt!*”

Some of the tricks Dinkey taught me were making mouths at the other horses and mimicking the Majah Sah and the Kunnel Sah and the other horses. Also braying like Lamplighter and even praying like Kate and Duplicate.

For this they all hated us soundly, and the Majah Sah said that if he ever got in hoof distance of us he’d skin-jerk us like rabbits.

But the way Dinkey would get down on his knees and pray like Kate and Duplicate would make us all nearly die, laughing.

He taught me to bite too, and to kick at the moon with both feet at night.

That night my mother and I had selected for our sleeping place the rich grass down in the valley by the great gleaming spring, where the sweet water came out from the great bluff. There were many acres in this meadow pasture which sloped from the valley up to the wooded hill.

I had gone to sleep with a good feeling all over me; for

## The Raid of the Bloodletters

I had had a fine romp with Dinkey and much fun, and to cap it all I had learned that mother was always to stay with me. The moon was shining half bright, and the cool dews had wetted the grass, and my mother had lain down near me.

Presently I waked with a start (my head being on the ground), for though there was no sound telegraphed, there seemed to be faint music, a kind of a long, howling, lingering sound, as if it came up from the bosom of the earth.

It was a grawsome sound, too, and sent weird feelings through me, and I saw that it affected my mother also, for she arose quickly, sniffed the air and not understanding it, pawed slightly at the earth, as was her nervous habit.

It ceased, and I lay down again only to waken with that same strange feeling. This time there was no long-drawn-out music, but the ground distinctly sent me telegrams of a kind of pattering, skirting the woods — a pattering — pattering of feet, that were soft and sneaky.

My mother whinnied nervously and I stood up, my nose pointed to the windward and trying to see with that best of eyes. But the pattering was afar off, and we could not tell by our noses just what it was.

“Wolves, I think,” said my mother, “though as yet I have not got a line on the smell.”

The moon still threw flickering light around. We could not see into the forest whence came the sound.

But presently the ground telegraph, muffled — patters — glided around into the teeth of the soft blowing wind and then, quick as the light’s flash, the smell came to me — far off, and so faint that no man’s nose could ever have detected it — but to us it came strong with odor and the telling.

For a moment I stood trembling; for the smell, slight as it was, brought back the odor of the first day of

## The Gift of the Grass

my life. I saw the home of the cruel master, the trees, and Gray Lize. I heard the pattering, sneaky foot, slipping upon me as I slept, the yellow eyes, the sickening dew-wet dog-odor, and again I rushed to mother, crouching close to her side.

“ ‘T is Sheepkiller! Sheepkiller! Mother!” My mother whipped the air: “ ‘T is he — the Bloodletters, the killing pack of the renegade dogs. Be quick, Hal,” she said. “ You are right, it is he, this *Kiotycut* gang. But fear not, it is not you they are after. Look!” and she pointed to the flock of sheep that lay sleeping on the hillside, looking like a small snow-patch in the moonlight.

“ Be quiet,” she went on, “ and see the fiendishness of these sheepkillers. They are the cunningest and cruelest of all man-serving animals. They are too cunning even for the Great White Man, for they are ghost dogs who work at night, and they come and kill and leave no trace behind. They never kill near home but afar off. Some of the fiends in that pack have come twenty miles to-night. Sheepkiller is the leader and he has brought them to the flock, sending his word out on the air in some way none of us know. Hark!”

I shivered, for while the dog-smell came steady from the hills in front, as the ground telegraphed this faint, slipping, pattering from that direction, three short, muffled, musical howls came from the hill in the rear, so faint I could scarcely hear them.

“ *Ow-ooo-ooo! Ow-ooo-ooo! Ow-ooo-ooo!*” they sounded. We looked, and there on the far hill, a large, hound-like dog stood, silhouetted against the sky. Then down he crouched leaving no sign behind, as if the earth had swallowed him.

But the effect of those signal howls from the hill were startling on the flock of sheep.

## The Raid of the Bloodletters

Up they arose in a body and like a great white wave came rolling down from the hillside toward us, frightened, frantic.

"Look!" said mother, "do you see? That dog on the hill is playing the game fine. He has been sent there to tell the other dogs where the flock is, and to stampede them toward their real danger. See, they are too near the barn and the house. Sheepkiller and the dogs who will do the work are hid in yonder wood toward which the sheep are foolishly stampeding. Hark! See!"

I looked where the dog-smell came from and saw the gliding forms of Sheepkiller and his pack crouching along the hillside, slipping in and out. Onward came the white avalanche of sheep. In a moment they were all around us, frantic, pleading, wailing:

"Help us, O Horses! Save us, O Horses with hoofs and teeth! Save us from the Bloodletters and may Bok preserve thee!"

"Stop," said my mother. "Stop and be quiet! Don't you see it is a death trap? Yon hill is full of dogs, who, scattering you, will kill you every one. Stop!"

For a moment they stopped, huddling around us. My heart went out to the little lambs; their frenzied mothers had forgotten them and they toddled around, calling for their dams as little children would. Some of them even ran under my legs hugging close to me, calling me *Buddy*, while the silly mothers bunched around my mother, crying, bleating, begging.

I felt like kicking the big ram with horns like pikes and great head like steel when he cried: "Oh, save us, thou great Horse with hoof and teeth — save us from the Bloodletters!"

"Stay where you are," cried mother. "It is all you can do. Save yourself," she cried to the big rams, "for you

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know the law of the animal world. Each one must save himself. Don't crowd us so," cried mother testily. "Save yourself, it is the law."

"Oh, Mother," I cried, "let us help them!"

"Hush, you fool!" she snorted at me. "You have much to learn, and the law of all laws is the Law of Nature—every kind for his kind. This is not my dying time," she went on—"it is not our fight. They are non-fighters, peace-on-earth people. They are cowards from a long line of cowards, fools from a long line of fools. They will listen not, nor heed, and I cannot give them what Bok has given them not. Be quiet or I'll hoof you!"

I knew my mother meant what she said, but I did so want to save the little helpless lambs.

My mother's words made them frantic again and off went the white wave toward the barn. "Save us, oh, save us, Horses with hoofs and teeth," they cried as they huddled around the barn.

Instantly heads popped out of the small windows of the stalls.

"Mercy on us! Oh, what is it!" cried Mrs. Lightfoot. "Oh, I believe I shall faint!"

"You skin-jerked fools," swore the Majah Sah, drowsily, "why do you disturb the sleep of decent people this way? Heh, why, sah, you old bull-necked ram?"

"Hush, hark!" cried the ram, "listen! Save us, O great Horses with hoofs and teeth!"

Again came the howling from the hills and it was answered, low and distinctly, from hill to hill.

"Dogs," cried the Majah Sah. "Hulee! and a dozen of them. Well, your jig is up, old Butt-Head, if you don't fight, and by Bok it is up with you! Why, Bookerskin you, with your head of horns and the way you butt your kind, you could knock Hulee out of a hundred dogs like

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those mangy curs. Like to help you, sah, like to help you, but — but we 're shut up, don't you see?" and he let down the window.

"We 'll pray for you," cried the old maid mules. "Oh, why were n't you baptized before it was too late!"

"Ya-a-s, we 'll pray," cried Lamplighter drowsily, "but oh, poor doomed and unshrive friends, it is not too late yet. For five flukes cash I 'll baptize as many of you as the dogs devour not. The regular price is ten flukes — see what a saving," and he eyed the old ram sadly.

"Save us, O great Ass with hoofs and heels, save us! We have no time now for baptizing," cried the ram, blindly rushing about in terror, for the howling circle of dogs was closing in around them.

"Alas!" cried the old maid mules, "it 's a skin-jerking you 'll reap both in this world and the next. Sorry — sorry — but the way of the unshrive is hard! Lost, lost, forever!" she cried. And the sheep only wailed and baa-baa'd the louder.

"I 'll bet you three ears of corn, Majah Sah," said the Kunnel Sah, "that the dogs eat half the flock, sah, of those Hulee-headed fools; what say you, sah?"

"Taken," said the Majah Sah, "anything for excitement. I hardly think they 'll get more than one apiece, to-night, though."

"Oh, mercy on us," cried Mrs. Lightfoot — "Majah Sah, I shall faint. Oh, it is a bloody thing and I never could stand the smell of blood."

"Hey, there, Soapsticks," cried the Majah Sah, "give us thy prophecy on the outcome of this. The Kunnel Sah and I have a small bet up."

Soapsticks woke up and rubbed his nose against the trough. "Gentlemen, this is going to be a awful thing — a

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awful thing! Mark what your Uncle Soapsticks says. Mark well—a sad thing, a sad thing—mark well. Watch the dogs—watch them—watch them closely. Watch the sheep—watch them—and say not when it is finished that thy Uncle Soap did not tell correctly. Watch, I say."

"If I were n't wind broken," cried Rowdy Boy. "O Hulee, things are against me."

The dog smell had grown stronger, and now from the woods I heard a low howl that went from hill to hill in a half circle. Then down came the creeping, blinking fire-eyes of the dogs, shining against the gloom of the hills, their white teeth shining now and then beneath uplifted, snarling lips.

Doomed now were the sheep if they scattered.

"Mercy," cried Mrs. Lightfoot, banging down the shutter. "Mercy! the poor things! Oh, I never could bear the least smell of blood. Majah Sah, just a taste of the liniment bottle before I faint. Oh, if I do faint do one of you gentlemen hold me—oh!"

Miss Lightfoot was not slow at catching on. "Oh, and I, too, am fainting! I feel as if I had perpetual blind staggers! Oh!" And the Majah Sah and the Kunnel Sah forgot all else trying to sooth the charming widow and her daughter.

I was watching the savage shrewdness of the dogs. Such cunning, such fierceness! They had a fully organized line of scouts around the place and their low howls from time to time, yelped wolf-like at intervals, told the leaders everything, gave them signals, army-like, while those who would do the work, kept in the foreground, down in the valley, near the sheep. And how low and musical the signal! For a single mistake of a howl too long or too deep would bring on them the Great White Man and his

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fire-belching, far-killing fire-stick, which reached them even on the distant hillsides, bringing blood and death at its touch.

I could see the dogs slipping around in a semi-circle, one side open near the dark woods, into which they wished to drive the sheep, as hunters their game. Here — north, south and east — I counted ten. From shadow to shadow they slipped, down ditches and gullies, creeping, creeping upon the flock now frantically huddled in the very place where they should not have been!

Suddenly Sheepkiller, leading the gang, stopped. In his path was the carcass of a dead sheep, untouched, save the small hole in the neck from which Sheepkiller always sucked the blood. This sheep had been killed by some prowling dog not of their band, a few nights before.

Sheepkiller sniffed the carcass and howled derisively: "O-hoo-oo! Hold, Bloodletters," he cried, as he threw back his head and uttered his long, soft howl, "O-hoo-oo! hold!"

Every dog stopped, crouching to the earth. Sheepkiller sniffed the carcass, turning it over gingerly with pulling claws.

"O-hoo-oo!" he howled derisively. "O-hoo-oo! and does the Great White Man think we can be caught by this carrion? O-hoo-oo! He shall learn that the Bloodletters eat no carrion — nay, even the warm flesh of the newly butchered lamb is all too stale for the dainty palate of the King of the Bloodletters. He sucks only the warm blood — O-hoo-oo!"

He sniffed it again: "Touch it not, O Bloodletters," he howled again — "touch it not, for the Great White Man has put on it the Powder of Death. O-hoo-oo! it is a joke — let the carrion lie where it is!"

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With a few more howls he gave his orders.

At a signal they were to rush in, scatter and destroy the flock.

For while the carcass of one sheep would have sufficed for all, this band, from long practice, had learned only to suck the blood. They were experts. And for this many sheep were needed.

These howls and their language (which I could understand so well), the frantic begging and wailing of the poor sheep, the dark shadows of the night, the terrible, flashing, yellow eyes of the pirate dogs, threw me into frantic excitement.

"Help them, Mother!" I neighed. "Save them from the cut-throat dogs! I'll do it myself," I cried indignantly.

Sheepkiller, who was near me, creeping up a ditch, heard and growled savagely:

"Ho-ho, would you, you little foal of the Evil One. Stay where you are. We have enough to devour you whole. Know you not the Law of the Dumb — the Gospel of the Breed and Kind? Every Kind for his Kind and Booker for the breaker of it? Transgress not that law, break not the unwritten rule or you will feel our fangs!"

"He is right," whispered my mother. "It is the law of the Breed. Be still — this is not our fight."

"Are you ready, O Bloodletters?" howled Sheepkiller.

"Ready, O Bloodchief," came back the answer. "O-hoo-oo! O-hoo-oo!"

"So am I, Bloodletters, *Kiotycuts*, cowards!" came a voice that sounded to me as one I knew and from the barn loft window, I saw the lithe body of Billy flash in the starlight as he hit the ground on the run, tossing his great, keen horns, with lowered head, the hair on his back making a line of quills.

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"Come back, come back, Billy, they will kill you, sah!" cried the Majah Sah.

"Oh, our poet, our poet," wailed the old maid mules, "they'll kill him."

And the Kunnel Sah shouted: "Come back, Billy, sah, they are a savage set, sah — ten to you one — they will eat you up, sah."

But Billy, not noticing them, ran on.

"Skin-jerk him," cried the Majah Sah. "I've often wished him dead, but now that the odds are against him — here, Darky, you demd niggah, open the stable door, let me out! No Southern gentleman will see the unfair fight and not shed his life-blood in the cause of the under dog. Here, Darky —"

"Darky has gone off stealing roasting ears for us," said Mrs. Lightfoot. "O Majah Sah, can't you help us save our poet? Oh, I shall faint, hold me," and she showed real signs of blind staggers.

"Just like a demd niggah," snorted the Majah Sah, trying to kick the stall down. "Never around when you want him."

I heard them snorting and trying to get out and Mrs. Lightfoot wailing:

"O Master Poet, why go to your death?"

Billy noticed them not at all but rushed straight up to the head of the sheep who were frantic and just prepared to rush and scatter to their death: "Back," he shouted, "with your backs to that bluff. If you scatter you are doomed! I'll fight them off. I'll lead you by the law of the Butt-Head family, learned from long years of battling, with our people in a bunch, our heads to the front and the bearers of young and their kids to the rear. Back! I'll defend you to the death, I, even Billy — not of your kind and not by the law of the Breed and the Kind: but facing

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death, there is no law, and in distress all Breed are my Kind."

In an instant he had bunched the flock and stood at the head with lowered horns, shaking defiance at the dogs.

"O Mother," I cried, "they 'll kill him — he cannot beat off ten savage dogs!"

"Keep still," cried mother, "your heart will be your doom. Let the Law of the Kind prevail — 't is no fight of ours."

"O Mother," I cried, "save him!" For as I spoke a frantic lamb rushed out, despite Billy's efforts, and ran bleating away.

There was a flash, and Sheepkiller struck it in the throat. I saw the blood spout over its white fleece, and I turned away sick, for the dogs soon sucked its blood. Maddened now at the taste, Sheepkiller howled derisively at Billy's defiance.

"Hold, Bloodletter! Let me kill yon braggart ram — a new kind of sheep! Ho-ho, that knows not the Law of his Kind and would fight — ho-ho! behold a sheep who would fight! He will soon be carrion."

"Go, Mother, go!" I cried. "Help him;" and in a frenzy of madness I rushed out at the bunch myself.

"Ho, little foal of the Unwise," snarled a large yellow-eyed hound, "and 't is thus you would defy the Law of the Breed," and before I knew it he sprang at my throat. I felt his hot stinking breath, his savage *gar-r-r-r*, snarling as he sprang for his death hold, reaching for the throbbing vein in my neck. Then came to me, in fury-madness, my mother fairly snorting in the Vengeance of her Breed. But already, into my own veins had flashed this same breed-madness, this unwritten law of the saving of one's self nor shall I ever know how I learned to strike the

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blow I did with my fore feet, smashing the hound across the loins, breaking his hold just as my mother rushed up in the fanned air of fury, and sprang on him with both her feet, snorting.

“Take this, thou Booker-breeding fiend! Take this and learn the Mother Law of the Breed, the Mother Law of blood for blood in the saving of the young: *Stay off mine and I'll stay off thine!*” and she trampled and kicked the life out of him, snarling and dying under her hoofs.

Then she turned on me savagely and kicked me and breasted me back to our own place saying, “Thou fool, thy heart will be the death of thee yet. They will kill him now and then I must fight for thy life and mine!”

“We will settle with thee for that,” howled Sheepkiller to mother, “we will settle it in the blood of the Breed, when we have finished with this fool sheep who thinks he can fight,” and with yellow, gleaming eyes and fangs exposed he rushed at Billy.

But no sheep it was that met him half way. Like a stone from a great arm, Billy shot his taut body across the battle ground, and as Sheepkiller sprang at his throat, he turned aside, like a white flash from the clouds, striking Sheepkiller on the side of his exposed head as the great hammer of the molder of iron strikes the white, hot metal, popping his neck with a crack like the forest branch breaking in the storm.

Sheepkiller turned feet above head, tail over, his broken head under his body. I saw blood gush from his twisted nostrils. He kicked, and lay dead.

“Billy, Billy — by Bok you got him!” I cried profanely; forgetting myself and rearing on my hind legs, I wheeled round and came down on an imaginary foe in a frenzy of madness and delight.

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Billy darted back just in time, for the whole pack rushed at him. There was a wild mixing, a flashing of white and horns and echoing blows from a head of steel as one dog after another felt the business end of the Butt-Header.

But they were on him, their fangs in his neck, flank and back, and though Billy fought like a fiend no sound came from him.

“Go, Mother, go,” I cried. “Help him.”

But even as I spoke there was a flash of tan before me and a deep loud growl heard above the din and snarls. “*Let everybody bee-have.*”

It was Shep, and he threw himself on the pack like a hyena, cutting the dogs off of Billy with his great gleaming teeth as a scythe blade cuts the weeds. It was beautiful to see Shep’s underhold on a hound’s throat, holding him to the earth while his choking, gasping howls died out in death, and I danced all the gaits in joy!

But Shep’s coming told the pack a thing I guessed not of: “Scatter, Bloodletters, scatter!” their new leader cried, “this means the Great White Man — scatter.”

They were too late. I heard a shout —

“Hold him, Shep, my bully dog!”

It was the Captain coming on the run, in his night clothes, ramming shells in his gun, and then as the pack scattered, there came two claps as the sky makes when the clouds come up, followed by the whining howl of hit dogs. Over the hill the remnant ran, the Captain after them and the *crack, crack* of his gun.

He came back after a while laughing: “Shep, Shep, noble dog!” and he patted the collie who still harried the throat of a dead hound. “Let up, old boy — he is dead and I got four more.” “Why, what’s this?” he cried seeing Sheepkiller, lying dead, his neck broken.

## The Raid of the Bloodletters

"Sheepkiller, too! the cut-throat that I have been trying for years to kill! Why, Shep, boy, did you get him? Bully boy! Bully boy!"

Shep barked and played around trying to tell his master about Billy. But the Master could not understand him. But turning he saw Billy, all cut up and bloody, standing bravely at the head of the flock.

"You infernal old fool," cried the Master, kicking Billy cruelly and starting him towards the barn, "how did you get mixed up with these sheep? Out here meddling where you had no business? They came near getting you and I am sorry they did n't!"

Never did a kick hurt so! "O Mother," I cried, "if men only knew! If we could only speak! Will the Great First Cause of Things let such injustice be?"

"It's none of our business, fool," cried mother, who was in no good humor with me. "You did n't make the Great First Cause. It made you."

Billy limped back to his hay loft, where everything there gave him an ovation. "Desist, friend, desist!" cried Billy, "I but did my duty and acted from the belief born in me."

"Have a little taste of the liniment, my dear boy, sah," said the Majah Sah. "You are all cut up."

"Bah," said Billy, "pennyroyal straight is good enough for me. These wounds are but scratches to the Butt-Heads!"

"But if it had not been for Shep they would have killed you, though we prayed most earnestly," said the old maid mules.

"Bah — maybe so — but why bother," said Billy. "The Butt-Headers die but once and knowing no hereafter, with its fool worlds of skin-jerking and bloody bones to make them cowards in life, we go to our death, if we

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do our duty here, unshrived and unafraid. But — but that kick — it hurt! Injustice is a wound that bites more bitterly than a hound tooth. Ah, well, I am used to it. 'T is the fate of genius to live unprized and die unappreciated."

## CHAPTER XIV

### I GO TO TOWN

I COULD scarcely sleep one night after mother told me the Captain had had her shod that day; "And, Hal," she said, "we are going to town to-morrow — the town of the Great Whites. It will be a great day there and much trading and traffic, besides what they call First Monday and Court Day, and you will see many new and strange sights. It will interest you, but," she added, "it interests me no longer. After a day with them I feel as if I had stolen oats myself! You have much, my son, to learn of the people who have a soul, but after to-morrow I am thinking the more you see of them and their ways the more you will like the ways of horses."

I could scarcely wait for morning, for I was eager to see the world; and when, at daylight, old Jake hitched the two mules to the wagon to carry to town a load of wheat, and Billy with his usual butting-in ability, or what the horses call *nag-nicking*, jumped into the wagon at the last minute, and went along, perched very solemnly on the biggest sack. I went off with them, following my mother and the Captain, with my tail up and holding my head very high. It was my first trip from home and away from my good friends, the great beeches, the blue-grass pasture, and the hills, whose faces I knew.

Past houses and fields, down strange and winding roads we went, and I stuck close to my mother, whom the Captain rode in a sweeping fox trot, a gait she naturally had.

## The Gift of the Grass

At a turn in the road, there rode out of a lane a handsome young man on a young saddle mare. At sight of us (coming on her so suddenly) she shied and plunged playfully, as if she wanted to have a little fun.

I pitied her and stood trembling with anger when I saw her rider strike her with the butt of his riding whip across the head until, crazed with fear, and dazed with the cruel blow on her head, she reared and plunged about foolishly and wildly. Blow after blow fell on her flanks while cruel spurs ripped into her sides, bringing the blood. At last, desperate and scarcely knowing what she did, she plunged into a fence corner and was brought up, squatting, trembling and shivering with fear.

"You little fool," cried the man, with a final cruel yank of her bit, "now go along and behave yourself!"

"Throw him," I cried to her, "throw him and kill him—the brute."

"Hush," said my mother, "attend to your own business."

Then she whinnied softly to the filly, who squatted down, whinnying frightenedly back to mother.

"Ah, little one," said mother to her, "you must be braver and calmer and bear your punishment better. It is all one can do when one has a cruel fool for a master."

I tried to comfort her and she whimpered, shivering: "I am sorry, but I was only playing at first and then he frightened me and I lost my head. I was sorry instantly and wanted to behave, but the blows—the cruel spurs,—" and she shivered again, sobbing in the horse way. "Of course," she went on, "if he had only spoken kindly to me at first, when I was frightened, I would have quickly come to myself and gone on, but—but—oh, that blow! it has dazed me, and those spurs! Is my side bleeding? I feel the cut places and the smell of blood frightens me so!"

## I go to Town

We were now going along again, the little mare very nervous and crestfallen.

The Captain was watching her and her pretty gait.

"You should be ashamed to treat a horse that way, Dick," he said. "Look at her sides — look at that knot on her head, and she is doing her best now to forget it and please you! She is beautifully gaited and as sweet as a schoolgirl."

"I am trying to break her of that foolish habit of shying," said the young man, "but I see she is a natural fool and I intend to trade her off to-day."

"A senseless and cruel way to break her of it," said the Captain. "Now the next time something frightens her and she shies, she 'll expect the beating again, and in the double fear of it she will be crazier than ever — may throw you or kill herself."

"I 'll trade her off to-day. I 'll let her kill the other fellow," he laughed. "I don't want her — she 's such a fool."

Then he laughed again. "I want a fast trotter — something that can step down the road in that new buggy of mine. The girls like that kind of a rig," and he winked leeringly at the Captain, and the Captain said nothing.

But I paced up to the side of the little mare again and told her how sorry I was for her. "Why, you little baby," she said girlishly, "you cunning little colt, I had n't seen you. My! but I 'd like to romp with you for I 'm only three myself! Of course it was foolish of me to shy," she said, "but — I did n't think! Oh, I do hope, dear little one, you will not have a cruel master when you grow up."

"If I do and he treats me that way I 'll break his skin-damned neck," I cried boastingly. "My sire 's Tom Hal," I said proudly.

She giggled and said: "You dear little rascal! You are

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my half-brother, for he is my sire, too; but my mother is a thoroughbred and that is where I get that fiery, quick blood, and that cutting-up fun in me. I 'll keep an eye on you, little brother," she laughed. "You 'll do big things, I 'll wager. My name is Villette. Remember poor, hot-blooded little Villette, won't you? But we must accept our fate — we cannot escape, but oh, the needless cruelty that man puts on us! See — what is that?"

She rounded up with a start, for there came out of a gate that led into a plain cottage by the road, a wan-faced girl, haggard of eyes and half sick as she stood holding a little child in her arms. I could see that she had once been pretty and that now she was in deep sorrow. As Villette stopped, to keep from running over her and her child, the girl held out the baby toward the bunch of us and said, "*Dick — Dick — please!*"

I saw Villette jump, nearly running over the mother and child (for Dick's spur had struck her again), and as we went swiftly forward, I looked back and saw the girl still holding the baby and saying:

*"Dick — Dick — please — just a word, come back!"*

But he never looked back, and the Captain, biting his mustache — a way he had when he was mad — dropped back with us and let him ride on.

"Did you see that poor girl and the helpless despair look in her eyes, Billy? What does it mean? Surely the Great Whites with souls do not treat the women of their kind that way."

"It would take a book to tell you all of that tragedy, Hal," said Billy, very earnestly and looking sadly away. "If I were to write it I 'd call it 'The Price of the Primrose Path.' Bah — and it 's a tale known only to the Whites. No other animals, free from lust and following the laws of nature (having no souls and no creed), ever

## I go to Town

have such tragedies. That is his child; but by his laws it is an outcast with its mother. His law should make her his wife, even if he had a dozen others — and make him protect and support her and his child or put stripes on him as a felon. Bah, but what can *we* do — we who have no souls and no God like them? Bah!"

"Billy," I said, "I wish I had stayed at home, under my sweet trees, and by our spring of water. I will see the cruel blows Villette got and the despair in the eyes of the little girl-mother all day."

"Oh," said Billy, grinning, "the curtain is n't up yet! You will see the only animal with a soul, in all his glory to-day."

But just then there swept into the road a beautiful carriage drawn by two stately-looking mares, with a solemn-looking driver on the box, sitting as stiff as an Indian, and a *nanny-gadder* among the Whites within, much be-powdered and over-dressed. I was admiring the stately, high-stepping gait of the mares, with their heads away up so high they could look down at me only by rolling down their eyes, when I happened to see their little, comical tails; tufts of switching, bobbing hair, they had for tails; they were doing their best with them to keep off the flies, and I burst into laughing, rolling on the grass by the roadside, it was so funny.

It was, of course, rude of me, but I can describe my feelings only by asking any of the Great Whites who read this, to imagine his own feelings, if he were to see a great, stately dame coming into a ballroom, in evening dress and corsage, and head up, and when she swept by, instead of seeing the graceful, long train, you saw — well, *you did n't see anything there that ought to be!*" as Billy expressed it.

"Get up," cried my mother angrily; "I am ashamed of you laughing at the misfortunes of those poor creatures!"

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Did you not see how they were heart-broken over their degradation? Their beautiful tails have been cut off by order of the *nanny-gadder* within!"

"O Mother," I cried, "I am sorry. I thought they had been born that way."

Then mother told me it was all done for what the Great Whites call the fashion, or what we horses call *Bookerbotts*, which is only another one of their wicked customs of trying to outdo each other in folly, wealth and dress — and that it was a horrible thing, the beautiful mares having been bound to a swinging table, head and foot, and their beautiful tails cut off near the spine with a sharp knife; and then, to keep them from bleeding to death, their fresh, bleeding stumps, seared with a hot iron!"

"Wounded and mutilated for life, disgraced among their kind," added my mother, "to gratify the passing whim of some idle *nanny-gadder* among the Whites! As for their haughty way and their not speaking to us, that is more cruel yet! Did you not see that their heads were checked up by the cruel overcheck, until the froth was flying from their mouths, their knees were sprung from their straining, highstepping gait, and their poor, arching necks, held so out of place, burned and ached all day with pain! The *nanny-gadder* in there will go to the home of some other *nanny-gadder* and there they will sit and lie and pay compliments to each other they do not mean, while the poor horses in the carriage, with aching necks and heads, and stamping the ground, while flies bite them without mercy, will stand out for hours!"

As we neared the town I saw two houses which I did not understand. One was a great squatly brick house, long and low and dirty with soot and the smoke which poured out of the tall chimney in the end. The other was stately and clean and had a beautiful spire which

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reached high above it and set it off beautifully. From the low squatly house I heard a great humming and buzzing as of a thousand bees swarming, and through the low windows we could see a few men and many women at work over things of wood and wheels and shuttles, and the women were not like Milly May and Kitty, but sallow and stooped of form as if they had the life worked out of them. I was thinking how much better it was to be a horse, when I looked into another room and then I could not believe it — for it was filled with the little, stunted, starved children of the Great Whites, who walked up and down between long rows of those wheels and buzzing balls of thread, snatching one here and tying it and another there, but always going, never sitting down, and never resting.

Billy was watching me and twisting satirically his lip, as he saw the indignant wonder in my eyes:

“Oh, you’d rather be a goat, would n’t you?” he laughed — “so would I — and you’d like to know what the two houses are? Well, one,” he said, pointing to the pretty one with the spire, “is the Church-That-Runs-In-The-Family. It was built in honor of the Great Sweet-One-Of-The-Whites, who was the most perfect Man that ever lived, and worthy of their worship, since He died to free them of their sins. The greatest thing He taught was love of fellow-men and nearly the last thing He said was that the little children should come unto him. But it’s a cold day,” said Billy, “when the White (who is the only one of us who has a soul, as you may have heard me remark before) does not make his pocket-book and his religion fit! So putting the two together, he has corralled all those little things up in that cotton mill so they will be nigh the Church-That-Runs-In-The-Family. That’s all, I swear it — just took them in. For they are the keepers of the Church who do it. They think they

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are Christians," said Billy, sarcastically, "and Christians are a set of the Great Whites who have bit off more than they believe and much more than they practise; but we have a name that fits that kind — they are *blood-niggers!* Bah! I only hope they have not lied (as usual) about their creed and that there is a hell, for there is where they would go!"

I was sorry I saw them. All day I could still see the tired, dead faces of the little children of the Whites.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE WAYS OF THE HIPPO-FIXER

AND never shall I forget that sight in town!

I was much excited, there being so much clatter and noise, so much going of men and horses, and loud talking and bantering and trading. It was all so different from my quiet wooded pasture and the great hill that always talked to me, saying so much, though silent.

Master hitched mother in a part of the town where the horse trading was going on, and there I forgot the blood-sucking of the little children in the mill for the misery of the poor creatures of my own kind.

It was a group of lame, blind, spavined and blemished creatures I saw, many of them so poor they could scarcely walk, and all so patiently wretched and resigned to their fate that it made me both pity and admire them. Around these, mounted on them, or standing near, were the owners of the horses, the lowest type of the Great White to my mind, drinking, lying, and with loud talk or quiet shrewdness, swapping or trading with each other.

Near by us there stood, very still, a small, bay horse, in good flesh and rather good looking. His owner, a shrewd, keen-eyed man, with much wit of saying things, kept saying: "Gentlemen, here's the best horse *in Tennessee* fur his chances and his inches! I'll trade him as he stands. Yes, gentlemen, Billy Blower sells him *as he stands*. An' they do say, gentlemen, them *that* knows Billy Blower that he's somewhat *of a horse trader*, so he is."

## The Gift of the Grass

“Will you trade for a good mule, Brother?”

I thought the man who asked it was of the preacher kind, he seemed so honest and earnest, and there was to his voice the same whang as of exhorting. And with no smile did he talk, but very dryly. He had come up, leading a mule which had to be waked up every time he moved around.

Mr. Billy Blower glanced at the preacher-looker and then at the mule, and a crowd, gathering around, seeing there was a trade up. Mr. Blower blew his nose, winked at the crowd and said: “Would I? *My* good friend, tradin’ mules is as much a part of Billy Blower’s pedigree as his fo’ grand-daddies. Now most people don’t have but two grand-daddies, but Billy Blower has fo’ — *an’ two of ‘em was mules!* Tradin’! Why I’m half man and half mule, that’s what Billy Blower is! How is that? Because, gentlemen, one of my grand-daddies was a man named *Jack’s-son!* Ortent I to be sumthin’ of a mule trader? An’ they *do* say, gentlemen, that my bornin’ was n’t booked for arrivement till the first Thursday after the secon’ Monday in March, but hearin’ there was a trade up, in which my daddy was bes’ man, I come the Friday before, to be in at the finish! Will the gentleman now give me his entitlements and pedigree so I may know who I’m tradin’ with?”

The crowd laughed, but the preacher-man only smiled the smile that never came off and kept looking at the little bay horse. After a while he said smiling: “So glad I hit you jes’ right. I kinder thought you’d trade for a *good* mule.”

“Oh, no,” said Mr. Blower satirically, “I would n’t trade for a good mule. *I’d* rather trade for a houn’ dog or sumpin’ that’s some account. What be yo’ entitlements?”

## The Ways of the Hippo-fixer

"Oh, jes' call me Brother Botts — I 've traded horses so long I feel as if I had 'em! Any ole name 'ull do to trade under, an' they *do* say up in my neck of the woods," he said still dryly smiling, "that I 'm somethin' of a trader myself!"

"Oh, they do," said Mr. Blower, "and I 'll swear they don't lie. Bother Botts, you *are* a trader an' no mistake. Who else but a *good* trader would call this a *good* mule," and he rapped the mule with his bare knuckles on the forehead, waking him up again with a start and a crazy swingin' motion of his head.

"*Blind staggers*," said my mother to me, "*that mule is sick!*"

"Would he do that, Mother?" I said aghast. "Would such an honest looking man do it?"

"Watch them," said mother. "He has a soul."

"A good mule," said Mr. Blower funny and again winking at the crowd. "Yes, he must be a good Baptis' mule for he went to sleep as soon as our brother there tuck his text."

The crowd laughed and the preacher-man smiled and said:

"Make your pass, brother, I 'll trade. You 've preached long enough. I 've got to hurry home and do a day's work besides kiss the old lady and have family prayers. As for his sleeping, it 's just a habit he 's got — sleeps when he hain't wuckin' so he can wuck more when he hain't sleepin'! Oh, no, he ain't no 'count — he 's got blind staggers right now!"

"Why, Mother," I cried, "he 's told it! What does he mean?"

"That 's to make the other man think he 's only joking. Oh, you don't know these people with a soul," she said, going to sleep herself.

## The Gift of the Grass

"Whut can yo' hoss do?" said Mr. Botts. "He 'pears like he 's glued to the ground."

"Oh, yes, he 's glued," said Mr. Blower, "he can't move a step! Why, man, I planted him here last March a year ago and I 'll prove by the town constable there, he sprouted in April an' been growin' here ever since! Did n't he, Bill?"

But the constable only grinned and walked off, saying: "Do your own lying."

"Wal, whut can he do now?" said the preacher. "How fast is he?"

"He ain't as fast now as he was onct. Why once, man, a cyclone struck us when there was nobody at home but him and me an' both of us was in the stable. I seed it comin', jumped on his back and we raced ahead of it five miles and beat it a good neck, to Blower's cave. We dashed into it jes' as the cyclone past. Then I named that there hoss Cyclone an' he 's named it yit."

"Well, jes' to make a pass," said Mr. Botts, "I 'll swap you if you give me twenty to boot!"

"O, you will?" said Mr. Blower. "Ever see sich jinerosity, gentermen? Somebody pass a hat in this crowd whilst the spirit of cheerity is afloat. We 'll build a church. Brother Botts is jes' *givin'* away ever'thing he 's got! Wants to give me that good Baptis' mule, guaranteed to go to sleep as soon as the text is tuck, for a no'-count hoss that can't walk! Why, gentermen, I could n't stand that! I 'm a hog I know — *half hoss and half hog* — but so he'p me Lawd, gentermen, I 've a little tech of jinerosity left, and such onselfishness as Brother Botts shows teches me in the tender spot. Why, gentermen, I 've turned widders from their homes in the snow of a January night foreclosin' my mortgage; I 've snatched the last biscuit from the mouth of starvin' orfants to feed to my

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hound pups, but so he'p me Lawd, I would n't take advantage of a man of sich jinerosity by takin' his mule without givin' him somethin' in return. No, Brother Botts, you must give me ten to boot. I orter say twenty, but I 'm jes' naturally a soft-hearted fool that loves to give to them that *would* give."

"When I trades I trades," said Mr. Botts and not noticing the laugh that was on him. "No ruback."

They bantered each other a long time, the crowd enjoying it.

"When *I* trade," said Mr. Blower, "it 's like settin' a mountain down in the sea. I 'm thar for keeps! You hear that, gentermen. I 'm a fool and full of cheerity, and cheerity thinketh no evil; it vaunteth not itself, cheerity suffereth long an' is kind, but when cheerity trades, she trades, no afterclap, no baby act, if she 's worsted, no evil thoughts. That 's cheerity, gentermen. Now, Brother Botts, look me in the eyes. *Here 's five to boot.* Would n't do it but I like the Church your mule belongs to — belongs to it myself."

"Here 's yo' mule, give me my five," said Mr. Botts quietly. "You are the kind of a man I love to trade with," and he thrust the rope halter into Mr. Blower's hands and took hold of the rope around Cyclone's neck.

He did it so quick Mr. Blower looked a little soberer, with the look in his face of a rat that begins to suspect he has been caught in a trap. I thought he would back out, but the crowd yelled: "You 're traded with, Blower, take yo' mule."

Mr. Blower handed over his five, took the rope halter in his hand and turned to go. But the mule was asleep, his head swaying. Mr. Botts was tugging at the little bay trying to get him to move. But the bay swung back and the crowd jeered.

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Mr. Blower winked: "Oh, I would n't disturb him," he said, winking again at the crowd. "I told you he 'd been growing there since last March. Wait till he goes to blossom an' then to seed. Don't try to transplant him too sudden like!"

The crowd jeered and Mr. Botts laughed.

"I knowed he had a hole in him som'ers," said Mr. Botts, quietly looking him over, "still I thought he *could* walk."

"Oh, jes' hill him up, Brother," said Mr. Blower, "I told you he could n't move. Hill him up and give him time an' he 'll raise you a hill of little cyclones. He 's goin' to seed now as fas' as he can."

Mr. Botts only smiled, then going closer, he pressed Cyclone across the loins.

The horse winced, almost falling.

"Kidney trouble," he said, "he can't move."

"Not till you pour hot water on his back," said Mr. Blower. "I managed to get him here that way. He 'll stand all right, tho', an' did n't you all heah me say, gentlemen, *I 'll sell him as he stands!* Oh, they *do* say that I 'm somethin' of a hoss trader, though my preference is always to trade for a *good* mule, even if he do sleep in church!"

"Look out there, gentlemen," said the constable, "he 's falling!"

Mr. Blower turned to look while the mule pitched heavily against him, knocking him over, then staggered and fell.

"Why, er-what 's the matter," he began as he got up very seriously.

"Nothin' at all, Brother Saint Paul," said Mr. Botts dryly, while the crowd yelled at the discomfiture of Mr. Blower, "nothin' at all to calk'late to disturb the peace of

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mind of a man given to so much cheerity as possesses yo' soul!"

"Get up," cried Mr. Blower, tugging at the halter. "Why, he don't seem to wanter get up."

"He *wants* to, Brother," said Mr. Botts sympathetically and with feigned sorrow, "he is a *good* mule and wants to do everything axed of him. He *wants* to get up right now but he can't — he's dead! I 'spicioned he had blind staggers this morning — he's been eating too much rotten corn. In fact I think I told you he had 'em, did n't I, gentermen?" he said turning to the crowd.

"Oh, yes, I try to be honest in my tradin' an' that's why I think they all say I'm *somethin'* of a trader myself. Yes, yes, I can haul Cyclone home an' I know how to cure them kidneys. Yes, yes, they *do* say that I can trade some, even if I do have to swap a *dead* mule for a *live* hoss and pocket five to boot. No, there is no ruback with me! I'm a man of my word."

"Say," said the constable bustling up, "say, Blower, you will have to get a wagon and move this dead mule from here."

"Yes," said the preacher man dryly, "yes, Brother Blower, and give him a funeral in keepin' with his religious views and the consistent life he led — for he's a *Baptis'* mule, you know, and bein' religious he may rise again yet," he added dryly. "But if I was you unless I had plenty of time, I don't believe I'd stay to see it!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE PRICE OF THE PRIMROSE PATH

JUST across the road where mother and I were hitched was a blacksmith shop, and hearing a horse neighing with fright, I looked and saw the smith's assistant holding a pretty mare by a short piece of wood which seemed to clamp over her nose. The frightened thing was leaning forward to it, her eyes glazed with pain and fear, but she was very quiet while the blacksmith picked up her foot to shoe her.

I shall never forget the pain and agony I saw in her eyes and ears.

"That," said mother to me, "is the twister. It is used many times a day whenever the horse shows signs of being the least afraid and unruly while he is shod. The smith, you see, has n't got time to speak kindly to them and quiet them, so he slaps on the twister. You might describe the twister," went on mother, "as an instrument of torture that makes you forget everything else, it hurts so. For if you move in the slightest it cuts into your nose and so you stand very still to avoid the punishment. Our noses, you know, are the very tenderest parts of us. By it we hear, see, and in the darkest night just by touching things with our nose we know what they are. Of course it is cruel, Son, to slip a piece of rawhide on a stick over our sensitive lips and twist the rawhide till the lip seems to be cut almost in two. Of course we stand, for we cannot move, and often for an hour that man will hold some horse under that cruel

## The Price of the Primrose Path

punishment until he is shod all around. If some one were to seize *him* by the nose with a big pair of pinchers he 'd have some idea of our suffering."

Just then the men came to the clump of trees near us, leading a horse that looked very familiar to me.

"Why, it 's Rowdy Boy, Mother," I cried surprised.

"Yes," said mother, "the Captain sold him last week for almost nothing. Poor Rowdy Boy — he is so wind-broken he is nearly useless. But I am truly sorry for him now, my Son, for the man who owns him is a common *hippo-fixer*. Ah, see, what are they doing?"

One of the men had slapped the cruel twister over Rowdy Boy's under lip and the other was thrusting some things, which my mother said were sponges, up his nostrils. It must have been painful in the extreme, for Rowdy Boy, even with the twister on, kicked and plunged. Great tears rolled down his face, until, from the great pain of sticking the sponges up his nostrils and the cutting of the rawhide, he stood at last dumb and still in the agony of it.

Mad at the sight of this cruelty, when they had finished and taken the twister off and tied Rowdy Boy, I went up to him. He was reeling for breath with his mouth open.

"I am sorry for you," I said, "can I do anything for you?"

"'Ulee 'ake it, 'al!" he said bitterly, "don't you 'ee I 'an' t'alk? 'Ell! — 'ell! it 's all my luck! I 'm doomed — 'al, doomed!"

"I 'm so sorry for you, Mr. Rowdy Boy," said the black mule hitched near. "Sorry for you," she said to Rowdy Boy. "This means that they are going to sell you for a sound hoss in the next hour or so, an' they 'll let the man that buys you find out the sponges is in yo' nose and likely as not he 'll kill you as having glanders befo' they

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even think of lookin' for the cause of all your swollen throat and nose."

Poor Rowdy Boy! He knew. He dropped his head, and for once there was a tone of resignation and gentleness in his voice when he tried to say a prayer to Bok for pity. But he could only talk as one with a bad cold.

I still could not understand until a black horse tied near us, whispering so as to save Rowdy Boy's feelings, said to me, "It 's this way, youngster; you see Mr. Rowdy Boy is wind-broken but very fast and otherwise a valuable hoss. He can trot to beat the band. Now, when he 's started up, he whistles and wheezes through his nose. These sponges stop that up, making him breathe out of his mouth, and the man who buys him never knows it till the hoss is nearly dead, from the swelling and running of his mouth. By that time them fellows" — and he nodded to the bunch of *hippo-fixers* — "are in another county. Why, there is old windy Pete," he went on, "who was so wind-broken he 'd wheeze if you breathed in his face. I knew them to fix him up that way and sell him for a sound horse five times in one fall. They worked it this way: one of them would go on ahead and palm off old Windy on some feller. In a day or so old Windy's nose would look like he 'd got into a hornets' nest and run like a yeller dog and not knowin' there were any sponges up there they 'd sell him for anything, thinkin' he had glanders, the most terrible disease we horses can have. Then 'long would come Mr. *Hippo-fixer*, number two, and trade for him, pull out the sponges and after he got over it, fix him up in the next town again. They worked that five times in one fall and would have made a fortune off of old Windy if the last man had n't shot him, thinkin' he had glanders. Poor Rowdy Boy — he 's doomed, as he said."

## The Price of the Primrose Path

It was, indeed, true; for they soon came with Mr. Dick, who wanted to trade them Villette, for he had never seen Rowdy Boy. They hitched Rowdy Boy up and he stepped off fast, and though in great pain, being dumb he could not tell it, and with his mouth partly open he did not wheeze. And Mr. Dick swapped, giving them one hundred dollars to boot.

"I've got one now that can step for the girls," he said as he drove off.

"Oh, mother!" I cried, "the *hippo-fixers* have got our little Villette! Let us go home."

But we did not start until nearly night and at that time I saw the long troop of half dead, half starved, maimed, and blind horses follow wearily home their new masters.

And nearly all were drinking, many riding up and down, shouting and cursing, for their side had won in the election that had been going on in the town, and I heard two of the judges, as they slipped down in our thicket to take a drink from a bottle, laughing at how they slipped in false ballots for their side.

As we went by the mill, the wan-faced, half-dead women, girls, and children poured out, with faces that haunted me many a night in my sleep under my sweet beeches.

But it was at the bluff by the ford of the little river we had to cross that I saw the thing which hurt me most.

A crowd had gathered there as we came down the road. The waters swirled pretty and deep, and on the grass the people were standing in bunches, awe-stricken, for a dead young mother and her baby lay tangled in the driftwood, and they were waiting for the coroner before taking her out.

I saw her pallid face, but smiling now in death, and clasped in her arms was the dead child she begged Dick to look at that morning. And her beautiful long hair floated

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in the waters, now up, now down, as the body rose and fell to the flood. And I thought that they both were alive and smiling at me, they looked so much happier than when I saw them before.

But the men who stood by me shook their heads and said nothing. And then I noticed one woman (who I learned was the mother), who stood alone and near the water (for no one would go near her to comfort her, because, I supposed, she had some catching disease common among the Great Whites, such as they call smallpox), and she stood dry-eyed, wringing her hands in a painful, nervous way and saying:

*"It was n't her fault, my po' child — my little un! Please, men, take her out and give her back to me!"*

And when she spoke, the Captain, wiping his eyes, sprang to the ground and started in with others, quickly to bring out the dead.

But I saw mother jump, startled and shivering, and then I heard what I never heard before and never wish to hear again — the panther-scream of the crazy horse, running away, bereft of reason and bent on death to himself and all in his path.

No one who has ever heard that fierce, wild scream of the crazy horse or *nag-mucker*, ungoverned by any law of speech or reason or language, will ever forget it. The roar of no lion in the woods is so terrible, to us, for we know that of all frenzied, insane animals, nothing, in fury madness and lightning speed, in terrible tooth and crushing hoof, in bared mouth, foaming and savage, in eye that kills by the very look, equals one of our kind when crazy, mad, and running amuck.

I ran shivering to mother in fright, for down the road came Rowdy Boy, screaming as he plunged along, dragging a top buggy behind him as if it were his shadow that

## The Price of the Primrose Path

flew swaying and rocking down the road toward the great limestone bluff by the river.

In the buggy clung Mr. Dick, helpless and pale with fright, calling:

*"Head him, men — for God's sake — he is headed for the bluff!"*

"Look out," cried mother, drawing me into a near by thicket, out of the road; "Rowdy Boy is crazy, from the pain and the stopping of his breath! Hear that maniac scream, and that wild talk! Listen! Come close to me and give him a clear road. Listen!"

*"I am Bok — I am Bok, the God of all horses — Give me room, ye white minions of hell, give me room for breath and death,"* roared Rowdy Boy, as he tore like a mad, winged horse toward the high bluff. *"Help me — help — I cannot breathe — I am dying,"* he screamed. *"I am Bok, I tell you — I am Hulee on wheels! Clear the way for the horse that is doomed — never had a chance — damned from the beginning — without any fault — of his — for ill luck, down — and out — death! Help me kill myself and my tormentor — Clear the way for Rowdy Boy, the God of Horses!"*

The lines were dangling under the flying wheels. Mr. Dick, frightened, pale and clutching the buggy top, kept saying:

*"Head him, men — head him from the bluff!"*

Instead, there was a rush for safety by the crowd, and then a crash as the flying buggy struck a great boulder, and for an instant I saw a picture in the air of a great horse plunging downward, turning twice over, buggy and man, and all smash in the jagged rocks below.

Mr. Dick never moved, and they rushed up and pulled him out from under the dead horse and shattered buggy.

They laid him out on the grass by the river bank, and then the queerness of it all struck me, for not ten feet

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away, tangled in the driftwood and smiling calmly up at the clear, pretty sky, lay she who had paid the Price of the Primrose Path.

“By Bok,” cried Billy, chewing his pennyroyal with great gustos of satisfaction, “by Bok, Hal, does n’t that stagger you? Who but the God of the Great Whites, who but the Great Balancer of things could have squared that account and balanced that wrong so neatly? Bah! But almost do I believe in their God!”

“But the *babe*, Billy,” I said, weeping, as I saw its bright young face rise and fall on the water, “and the poor, deceived girl-mother? What have they done that death and infamy should be their portion?”

“Hulee take it,” said Billy, “what a big question a little fool can ask!”

He chewed thoughtfully awhile and then said, “Why it is, Bok, I know not. But this I do know, that about the time that I begin to think there is something in their God-idea, up bobs some question that upsets all of my theology! Bah!”

But my mother said to me that night: “I heard your question, Hal, and it is easily explained by us whose religion is that of the Star Pointers. Be not worried about the poor mother and her babe, for as sure as every star above us is balanced so must this be balanced, and there must be coming to the wronged mother and her babe yet, in the Great Beyond, enough more of a Greater Life to pay for that which is taken here. It must be, Hal, or their God is a liar and a cheat.”

“Bah, Hal, but the Great Whites — you have had a day with them. Honest, are n’t you glad you are a horse?”

It was nearly dark when we reached home. The Captain unsaddled mother and we glided swiftly to the cool spring and the sweet grass.

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And then I heard a clattering gallop coming towards us.  
It was Villette and she came laughing like a romping girl  
just out of school.

“Little Brother, little Brother,” she cried, “are n’t you  
glad to see me? The Captain bought me and Jim led me  
home. I ’m to live here — hurrah!”

After that she plaited my mane prettily and romped  
with me, playing Shadow Horse, till bedtime.

## CHAPTER XVII

### I GO TO THE FAIR

ONE cool morning I started to the Fair near a little town called Columbia, the Captain riding mother and I following, since I was not yet weaned.

It was my second trip from home and a most eventful one to me. I crossed many rivers (though my mother afterwards told me they were only creeks), and how I did enjoy seeing things which were new to me.

We soon overtook others going, and such handsome horses and colts, all so sleek and fat, shining, groomed for the Fair. For all of them expected to take prizes (which Billy said was the greatest thing in life — to keep on expecting to take prizes).

All of them but me.

I knew that I went along merely because I was not weaned. None of them noticed me; or, if they did, it was only to laugh and nudge each other and ask:

“Is this the little sheep-pony?”

I was very chagrined, but I learned that Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right (who was the grandest colt of them all and headed the procession to the Fair) had told them about me and Sheepkiller.

Even the Captain would not notice me, and if any of his friends asked him what I was, he’d say, “O nothing much,” and talk of something else.

But I noticed that though they all looked so fat and sleek and started out with much noise and jollity, they

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soon began to sweat and to grow leg-weary and cross. They had been stalled and pampered for the Fair and the journey began to tell on them. But lank and rough as the day I was born, used to toughing it and running out, companion to the hills and grass, all summer and fall, I felt not at all tired, but seeing the beautiful new sights along the road and bathing my feet in the cool creeks as I crossed, I was excited and happy and my heart beat fast and little racy thrills ran up my back.

I led the whole crowd of them, gliding in the long pace of my sire and going such a swinging clip that I had the tongues hanging out of every fat and hot one of them.

Hansomest of all of them was Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right, as I said, who had nicknamed me *Sheepy*, so that every now and then some colt or mare or mule would say:

“Say, Sheepy, go slower!”

“O Sheepy, there’s plenty of time — this is no race,” and much more.

I kept away from the Red Faced Man who had once owned me, for I still feared him. But once he saw me and said:

“Say, Captain, ain’t your boy riding that little sheep-pony yet? What a beautiful tail he has!”

Then he would laugh till he reeled in the saddle and Master would flush red, but say nothing.

I had never imagined anything so grand as the Fair, and when I went into the gate and heard the music and saw the fine horses and handsome ladies, I just thrilled with it all, arching my neck and stepping lively. It was at the old race track, in a beautiful grove, near Bigby Creek, and the grounds were crowded with people and horses, and such noises and nickerings and going on I never heard! And the people seemed to have such a

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jolly time eating lunch and watching the rings of horses, and talking, and listening to the band play.

I stood by my mother, who was tied to a tree, and I kept my eyes always on the rings of handsome horses. But my mother would not look, and I guessed why — she was ashamed of me — I felt it — and when after a while the Judges tied the blue ribbon on Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-and-All-Right, and the band played and the crowd cheered, I saw my poor mother bow her head as if asleep and I almost cried myself, wondering why the good god Bok made some of us handsome, and with all the gifts of friends and place, and sent other of us into the world for scorn and injustice.

But I would not let that make me unhappy, for Billy had told me that the thing at last was all within yourself, and, in the long run, evenly balanced in the world, however circumstances seemed for a while to be otherwise.

“Envy not, Hal,” he had said only a few days ago, “the seeming happiness of those of place and power. You know not where the nail has been driven into their foot. Be generous and kind and you will, if not happy always, at least be at peace with your own conscience, which is the thing at last.”

So when Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right trotted by I called out:

“Congratulations, Sir — the ribbon was well placed!”

But he only said testily, “Go to Hulee, thou little fool!”

But after dinner — oh, it was grand! — for they brought out the great, splendid trotters hitched to high-wheel sulkies. How beautiful they looked and how splendidly they stepped in a great whirl of dust and amid the cheers of the crowd! It was exciting and beautiful, but something seemed to be wrong with the action of many of them. They seemed to step too high and not close enough

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to the ground. And they were not true gaited like my mother and me, but some of them sprawled and some paddled with their fore feet.

My mother then explained to me that the trotter's gait was not the natural gait of the horse like the pace, but was artificial and made, and that it had not been tried long enough to be a fixture like mine and hers. But all this sprawling and paddling was merely cut-crossing back to an unfixed tendency.

"A straight line," she said, "is the shortest distance between two points, my son. Now we pacers go that straight line when our gait is true, moving as we do both feet at the same time on the same side; but trotters step diagonally and thus follow the hypotenuse. And so giving both extreme speed the pacer will always be faster. What a pity they have no chance on the turf to prove it!"

"Why, Mother," I said boastingly, "I could beat those trotters myself."

At this she looked up and laughed for the first time that day.

"O Hal, Hal, if thou only had as much sense as thou hast nerve," but I could see that she was proud of me for all that.

Then came the beautiful horses of the saddle rings and these excited my mother greatly. And they were such handsome mares and horses, with such good riders on them! And they put them through their paces — fox-trotting, cantering, single-footing.

"Oh," said mother, "look, Hal, look! and that is what I would like you to be."

It was beautiful, but it did not thrill me as did the next event — a thing which changed all of my life.

Two men came on the track riding pacers, great, strong, lithe stallions with clean, statue-cut faces, long,

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graceful tails, manes, sloping, arched necks, clean, long legs, and, oh, such a bunch of muscle in their hips!

They were a grand looking gray and bay, short of back, close ribbed, and so calm and resolute and able to do.

Two men were on their backs, in small, light saddles, and as they rode up the track I could see they were warming them up; but the two great, grand horses paced so easily and so low to the ground they did not seem to know it, though I could see they were going fast.

“Mother! Mother!” I cried. “Oh, what are they? Oh, how grand!”

And I reared and nickered in wild frenzy at them and my eyes flashed and I tried to break away to them and I felt the call of my kind.

“Be quiet — they are only pacers — there is not even a prize for them as for the trotters. Their owners are doubtless going to race them a quarter for fun and to advertise them as sires for saddle horses; for pacers make great saddle horse sires,” she added, “as I hope to prove by you some day, my little Hal.”

“But look! look at them, Mother!” I cried, struggling to get away in my wild desire to go to my kind, for the two great horses had come to the post, and at the word they shot away like great birds, their ears laid back, their tails out, their riders standing up in the stirrups and bending over their flying manes to the saddle.

“*Go, Locomotive! Go!*” shouted the crowd.

“*Go, Joe Bowers! Go!*” yelled the partisans of Joe Bowers.

I stood on my hind legs neighing and screaming, scarcely drawing a breath, I wanted to go so myself. I saw how made up and artificial the sprawling, paddling, trotting horses looked now, to horses that had the speed and

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the stride of nature and the call of their kind in their heels.

Down they came, buckling to it, squatting low on the ground, striding as I saw my mother stride in her swift flight, full a rod and a half at every stride of the great, driving hind legs, from heel to heel.

Round they came, neck and neck — round — round!

The people shouted — for these were their own horses, the pride of their homes and the mettle of their own pasture. Such noise, such a roar, and the flying, beautiful things!

I do not remember. I could not control myself, for I rushed away from mother when they came by me like a whirlwind, plunged on the track and flew after them, my little tail up like a banner, my blood a-fire, and my brain burning with the frenzy of flight. I could see them moving before me like a great locomotive I had heard of, and though I paced my best I could only follow behind. Down, down the stretch I went, my little stride as true as clock work, my little legs working as I saw the legs of those ahead move — low on the ground, and true to the line of their sweep — down — down — flying — forgetting everything except that I, too, was a pacer and of the blood of my conquering kind.

And then such a roar! It shook the grand stand — a roar of cheers and laughter that scared me wild. Panting, I rushed into a crowd of men who blocked the track — one of whom threw his arms around me and literally picked me up, struggling and neighing for mother to come to my help.

*“Hi — hi — my little pacer! Oh, my little Hal! My Gawd, but ain’t he oil in de can?”*

I whinnied and lay still in his arms, for it was my old friend Jim.

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Joe Bowers and Locomotive had finished before I got there, and when Jim set me down on my legs again a crowd was around me, while Jim, shining as to his black face, was telling them all about it, while such shouts as these came up from the throng around me:

“Well, did you ever?”

“The damned little tow-head!”

“Great Scott, how he can fly!”

“What is that colt — two hundred dollars for it,” said a man, breasting up and from whose talk I knew he was not of the land.

My mother had come, breaking loose and following me, nickering and calling, and the Captain took me by the head, his face all shining and smiling.

And then I flinched, shamed, for I heard the Red Faced say:

“Oh, it is only a little sheep-pony! I bred him! He’s got no pedigree to speak of!”

And my master, the Captain, flushed hot and said:

“Well, sheep-pony or not, I am offered two hundred dollars for him; and I don’t mind telling you, gentlemen, he is by the same horse as that gray there that has just paced that quarter under the saddle in twenty-nine seconds.”

“Not twenty-nine seconds!” said the Stranger who had offered the money for me — “you don’t mean to say they paced that quarter in twenty-nine seconds?”

“Here is my watch,” said Master, showing the strange man his ticker, “and here are two others,” he said, as two more gentlemen who had timed the great pacers, came up.

The strange man looked as if he could hardly believe the watches.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I am from Ohio, and I thought we had horses, but, if you have a tribe of horses here that,

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untrained, can do that, and under the saddle, carrying a hundred and seventy-five pound man on his back, all I can say is that you have the greatest family of horses the world has ever seen. What are they?"

"They are Hals," said Master, proudly, "and there is their sire — the sire of Locomotive, and of my little sheep pony here," he said derisively, looking the Red Faced one in the eye.

And then I saw my sire flash out from the crowd, and glide up the track in great calmness and dignity, in that same long, frictionless stride, his dark legs and mane and tail splintering the sunlight and his rich, red roan hair gleaming like gold.

How proud I was to know he was my sire and the grand gray, named Locomotive, was my half-brother.

"O Bok — Bok," I prayed softly, "forgive me! I thought you were unjust this morning, but now I see you have so many ways of making things equal in this life."

But all our fun came near ending in a tragedy, for there was a group of schoolgirls from the Female School in the town, who stood looking at us, and presently one of them rushed up, grabbed me around the neck, and said:

"Why, it is my little Hal," and before she thought, she turned to Jack, who was standing by Master, and said:

"O Jack, did n't I tell you so?"

The day after I was born I saw my first sunrise. There was a pale circle of light in the east, like the face of the Great White in sorrow, and then a flush of crimson and the sun smiled at me.

"Milly May," shouted her father, the Red Faced one, "you have broken your promise," and he pushed in, angry and mad, between her and Jack. "Don't touch that thing," he cried, glaring at me, "go back to the school."

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"O Dad, I forgot," she said softly, "I did n't mean to."

"But *I* have n't promised you anything," said Jack, and he turned on him white with rage, but cool; "and don't you or any man rebuke her here before this crowd, or by God —"

"Oh, come," said the Red Faced one, growing calmer and pleasant, "I was n't talking to you." Then to Milly May:

"Go on back to the girls, Honey, they are waiting for you."

And Milly May slipped away, passing Jack and not seeing him.

Jack's face was livid, and I saw how wise was the Red Faced one in ignoring him.

Then the Captain rushed in and took Jack aside, saying:

"Are you a fool, man? That will not do — come."

And Jim led me again to my mother who nickered with affection, rubbing me all over the face with her lips and saying:

"Hal, my little Hal! You are right. You are a pacer. Before you were born I had strange dreams of Bok, and saw a great horse with wings of white, legs of steel, and feet of pure gold. It was the vision and the dream from Bok. O Hal, it was you even then throbbing in my womb. Thou wilt make me great among the mothers of the land!" and my mother kissed me again, sobbing.

I was proud and happy. I felt that I was indeed sent of Bok, for had not my mother had that vision? And I loved to think of it for it is a great, grand feeling to feel that you were sent for a reason of Bok — Bok the Great Father of horses!

All the stable except the Lightfoots (who were flirting with two horses from Giles County), and the Kunnel Sah and the Majah Sah, who were drunk (there being

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much liniment there), came up to congratulate us. I heard Soapsticks talking (for Cropper McCrea had ridden him to the Fair):

“Mistress Hal, remember what I said? Ha — remember my prophecy as to that little colt? Did I not say — *Watch — him — watch — him*, first in his young days — watch him closely and *then see!* Ha, Madam, is not old Soap a prophet?”

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE IOWA BRAND

I DO not know why it is, but in the long life I have gone, I have found that our greatest sorrow often follows on the heels of our greatest joy.

It was a long journey and the colts and horses were tired; for, as I have said, they had been pampered for the Fair and were ill-prepared, with their soft flesh upon them, to go the long journey that day. Besides, all of them had gone to the Fair expecting ribbons, and of course but few of them had won them. Thus did nine-tenths of them plod the long miles back home, tired, sullen, and disappointed.

Of all the crowd, Master and mother and I were the lightest hearted: for though Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right had won the ribbon, I had created the sensation of the day; and better than all, the Money-And-The-Price had been offered for me.

“Ah, Hal,” said Billy as I jogged along by the side of the wagon, “I am afraid you and I will now part. For you will learn later that it is Money-And-The-Price which counts most, after all, with the Great White Man. It alone talks, walks, races, or rides with him. There is, it is true, in him, some little half-believed half-practised ethics of religion, and some charity and some friendship for those who stand not in his way. But the great Doing and Moving Cause of his life, the great Unattainable is not his art nor his learning, nor his religion, nor even his

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life or his death, but his Money and the getting of it. Even friendship is brushed aside if it get in his way, and his religion is as naught! Ah, Hal — Hal — now we will part. "Say," he whispered so tearfully that I had to laugh, "do you see any pennyroyal growing along the road? I need something cheering whenever I think of the Great White!"

And the Money-And-The-Price had been offered for me! Master was happy. To-morrow he would part with me — take me from my mother and home and give me to the stranger for the Money-And-The-Price. For I had heard the stranger say he would be over to see him the next day.

I do not know why it is, too, that with the Great White Man, as with us, those who succeed and are happy are hated by those who succeed not. Every horse and colt in the journey home rebuffed and abused me; and every man there, save Master, wished that something might befall me. There is no name in the White Man's language for this strange trait of the animal. But in our language they are called *nag-stringers*, a word coming from the cruel practice of our untamed days when wild wolves would rush to the rear of our grazing and wind-fleet ancestors and tear loose with their bitter teeth the tendons or hamstrings of their fleet, hind legs.

Unstrung and helpless they could not run away and so were devoured by the pack.

I felt it and stayed to the front; but just in a mile of home, Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right and Gray Lize, who had been carried to the Fair by her owner in hopes that some Cotton Planter, from the South (who always visited our Fair to pick up bargains in mules or horses) would buy her, came at me savagely (Gray Lize's ears laid back and fury in her eyes), in a narrow part of the road, and neither Master nor my

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mother was near me to protect me; and worst of all, I did not know until afterwards that they had selected this spot because on both sides were the terrible barbed-wire fences of the Great White Man. In fact I had never seen one of these fences before, nor heard of them; but I learned then and afterwards from many maimed, blemished, and ruined horses, that of all the cruel and unanimal curses invented by the Great White Man to control and subdue our kind, the barbed wires are the most cruel and the most unnecessary.

For on this occasion as on thousands of others, as I have afterwards noted, it was growing dark and I could not see the wires, and when Gray Lize and Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right made their spiteful rush at me, in my fright I plunged head first into the cruel barbs!

I was tangled and cut up and screamed in agony for mother. I heard her coming, Master hurrying her on, and my *nag-stringers*, having accomplished their purpose, slipped back into the crowd, laughing.

I heard Gray Lize say: "Well, we have put the Iowa Brand on him for life," which I learned afterwards is a word coined to fit the many thousand of blemished horses in Iowa, it being one great State of barbed wires.

I would have killed myself struggling and plunging in what seemed to me a red-hot picket of barbs, had not Master jumped from his horse, seized me about the neck, and Jim, running up, held me and got me out.

Then I was a fearful sight. The skin was torn from my shoulders and sides and hung down in shreds. My fore-arms were cut to the bone and, worst of all, as is always the case, in the struggles of a horse to get out, I had been caught by a wire just back of my coronet, in the natural sink there between my hoof and my ankle and the more I

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would pull and plunge the more the barbed wires would saw and cut.

I could not raise my forelegs. Master feared my tendon was severed.

"If it is," said the Master to Jim, "we will have to kill him to-morrow to put him out of his misery."

Jim picked me out and put me into a wagon and I saw Billy looking very downfallen and anxious, and though I bled badly, Jim got me home.

They sewed up the worst places that night, and for weeks I was a terrible sight and stood it dumbly as best I could. But for Jim and Reddy I think Master would have chloroformed me as an act of kindness. For Jim, who had moved over to the Master's to crop with him next year, kept declaring my tendon was not severed, although I could not walk.

In the end he bought me from Master, agreeing to give him ten bushels of wheat from his crop of the following year's harvest.

And thus maimed and blemished I became the property of Jim.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CHURCH THAT RUNS IN THE FAMILY

IT is wonderful what the Great Cause of Things will do for us if only it be given a chance. I thought I was ruined by the barbed wire, but gradually the Great Cause, working day and night, even while I slept, healed up the cuts. First my sides and shoulders got well and so well knitted that in a few months even the scar could not be seen. But the cut across my coronet and ankles was longer healing. At first I was not able to put my weight on my foot, but under Jim's home-made lotions of hot mullein tea (so highly recommended by Granny Gray and who used me as an example of its good effect ever afterwards), that also healed, and as my tendon was not cut, by Christmas it was as good as ever, though I carried the Iowa Brand there the rest of my life.

Those were wretched days for me — that first winter — and I came near starving to death under Jim's shiftlessness and for lack of corn.

But not from my memory will the beauty of it ever leave, it being my first winter, and the story of leafless trees and bleak hills snow-blanketed, and nights of cold stars and ghostly moonlight over the white hills, being even yet with me.

For if my first summer had been sweet and lushily beautiful, the winter was now stern and solemnly beautiful; and all through life I have found it so, that there is beauty always in eye distance of us if we but have the

## The Church that Runs in the Family

heart and eyes to see it. "For it takes both," said Billy, "to see beauty."

I suffered, it is true, from the cold and I roughed it in all kinds of weather; but the aftermath grew in sheltered places and was a gift to me, and the hard life I led put the Able-to-do in my veins, or what we horses call *Steed-stars*.

Nor must I forget in telling of the things that I ranked sweetest to me, of that first winter, and of the tree which the Great Whites called their Christmas tree.

Jim had but an open log stable for me, and it being colder there than under the hillside in the thick woods, I wandered out at my will. And the schoolhouse being lit up that night, I went there. I could see it all, so beautiful to me and so new — the tree lit up with candles and bright with presents; the children around it full of the Glad Heart and the great hickory fire lighting up the room, where, in the midst of them, tall, and her beautiful hair now done up on her head so like the grown-up of the Whites, I saw Kitty standing, a creature of such beauty and hope and with the happiness of things written over her face, that I never expect to see the same picture again. Under the starlight across the snow she went home, she and the Teacher. Merrily she sang, waking the sleeping mocking-bird from his sweet night sleep in the cedars, thinking it was his mate and chirping dreamily his note of recognition.

At which, Kitty, glorying in her gift, and the happiness of it all, laughed till her laughing rang like a silver bell through the woods; and then in the shadow of the cedar as they passed quickly through it down the path to the house, the Teacher grasped her quickly in his arms, and smothered her laugh with a kiss, saying in his great happiness:

*"My bird-wife — that is to be!"*

## The Gift of the Grass

I soon found out what it meant to belong to the Church-That-Ran-In-The-Family, for the next night (it being what they called Prayer-meeting night), they held their meeting at the *maestremare's* house (whom they called Sister McCrea), she "being a saint that is ailin'," said the Long Voiced One (who held forth as their shepherd), "an' it's good and meet that we worship at her bedside."

The cabin was filled with Sisters and Saints, and Billy had told me that if I would look and listen I would see how the Great Whites hold their love feasts in which, he satirically remarked, "is shown their wonderful love for themselves."

We went there and listened. Songs they sang full of battling and dying for a cause and of Great Love for all mankind. And prayer in which the Long Voiced One and the Sister Saints went down in the dust, "as worms of the earth and unworthy to live," quoted Billy, and yet added, "*damned if they die!*"

Such penitence, humbleness, love of all kind, such pure-heartedness, love of self and devotion to one Great Sweet One of whom they had just read, His word being for them to forgive, to do no wrong, to think no evil, to resent no blow, to love even one's *nagger* as one's self.

And the Long Voiced One read the chapter from the Book about the soiled woman who had sinned and of the Great Sweet One who raised her to her feet from the dust and sent her away forgiven and glad.

"Amen and amen," said all the Saints, and of them all the *maestremare* loudest.

Greatly did the devotion and loftiness fill me with pleasure, and I told Billy the religion of the Great Whites surpassed all others — even his, the Butt-Headers, and the Star-Pointers' of my own sire.

"Bah," said Billy, "wait — you have n't seen their real

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religion yet. This is only what they *say*, whereas the real religion of all of us is what we *do*."

Then the *maestremare* stood forth among the saints and in the humble whine of the Long Voiced One, only in a higher key, she brought up Kitty before the Church-That-Ran-In-The-Family. And as she talked, my heart burned with hot anger, and I stamped my feet in madness for the lies she told. For she called her the scum of things earthly and told (while the saints looked pleasingly horrified) of the scene in the woods to which much that comes from an evil mind was added.

And the Saints all condemned Kitty and called her names that were not in the Book, and the Long Voiced One said when she had finished: "*Sister, you done right as a Saint of the Lord to tell it. Let not this Delilah come again to the temple of the Lord — let not this black sheep mingle with our lambs.*"

And the Saints all said, "Amen and amen," and had it all told over to them again and again by the *maestremare*, with many exclamations of pleased joy, such as, "*Laws-a-mussy!*" "*Did you ever?*" "*The hussy!*" "*Saints alive!*"

And forgotten was all they had read from the lips of the Great Sweet One and naught to them the religion they had preached and sung of.

And they condemned her as one and voted to drive her from the Church-That-Ran-In-The-Family.

With bitterness and curses they did it.

"Bah," said Billy, butting me harder in the ribs I thought than necessary, "*that* is their religion — the thing that they *do*. That other, the thing that they preach, that is only their pipe-dreams of a heaven which will never be for them. What thinkest thou of the Great Whites' religion now? Bah — the Tail-Holders and the Saddle-Sitters have them skinned from here to Hulee!"

## The Gift of the Grass

To Hulee with it all! Let me rather be a Butt-Header and believe nothing, if I cannot believe good of my kind!"

The aftermath of the blue grass had fallen long and rank in the Captain's yard around the Big House, and the snow being light and melting quick, the next afternoon I hobbled up there and slipped in where I could find it in plenty.

Justin and Kitty had gone to coast down a wooded hill near by, where the shade had held the snow, and My Lady and the Captain were alone, when I saw the great *maestremare* coming slowly up the hill, puffing in her great bulk, and with all the sternness of much malice across her set face.

Not again could I eat the sweet grass, for I felt the doom for Kitty's happiness that was coming. And she did it with shrewd wickedness and seeming truth and humbleness. And My Lady sat pale and stern as she told it and the Captain flushed red and angered.

"Now it ain't that I keer for m'se'f," she said; "no, I 'm mighty glad to git rid of the hussy after sich a life as I 've seed her lead. But it 's pretendin' bein' what she ain't, and foistin' herself on good people, bein' 'dopted as their child. 'Why,' I 'lowed to myself, 'Sally McCrea, of course you are mighty fort'hit to get rid of her, you a virtuous woman and belonging to the Church (for it runs in yo' family); but air you doing right to let them good folks take into their house and raise as their own, a little minx that meets a man alone in the woods, a-huggin', a-kissin' him, an' the next day gets shoes and clothes from him, an' then leavin' my home chancin' a scandal by him a-callin' aroun' ever' now an' then a-givin' me money to treat me — a virtuous woman — an' — an' — belongin' to the Church, which runs in our family!'"

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"Oh," said My Lady, "please stop! This is terrible! Mrs. McCrea, surely you are mistaken! I have never seen a purer, more open-hearted —"

"Yes, before you all," she snarled. "But it's been up befo' the Church an' they turned her out, — oh, wal, say, yes, call her in, yes, call her in here befo' me an' see if she'll deny it — call her."

The Captain jumped up in his hasty way and walked up and down the room. Then he turned on her fiercely: "Were you fool enough to do that and blight her life like that? I don't believe you, madam," he said, as straight as a man can put it to a woman. "You talk that way of her — why, let me tell you what I saw" — and then he opened on her and told of her cruelty in beating them and how he found the motherless children in the woods. Then he shook his finger at her and said, while My Lady begged him to be quiet and tried to stop him, but his hot blood was up:

"Any woman that will treat motherless children that way will tell any kind of a lie about them."

"O Captain, Captain!" said My Lady, "be quiet!"

Oh, but he reckoned not in the deep shrewdness of the *maestremare* — under mock resignation was her hypocrisy.

"It's hard on a po' woman to be misjudged," she said, ever so quietly, "and fer doin' her duty by the gal an' tryin' to cure her of her ways. Yes, I did beat her pretty bad, but I was mad an' I beat her for meetin' him in the woods an' for wearin' his clothes an' for wantin' to meet him ag'in. You'll save your breath by fetchin' her here an' let her deny it if she will."

And then as if benighted by fate, Kitty and Justin came in and her cheeks, even like the Cherokee rose, flushed with red in the middle and she was so pretty and happy

## The Gift of the Grass

that I thought even the great wicked heart of the *maestremare* would take pity.

At sight of the woman, Kitty slipped up to My Lady and caught her hand, saying only "Oh!"

"Kitty," said the Captain sternly, and not noticing Justin with her, "here's this creature that beat you that night, and she came with a damnable lie on her lips. Tell me the truth, child! Did you —" and he stopped, for he had seen Kitty's face.

"It's no lie," shouted the woman, now mad, "and I dare you to say it, you hussy. I told him you met the Nettles man in the woods alone, and I saw you kissin' an' huggin' him, and you tuck his clothes the next day, an' — Say, now tell 'em the truth, *did n't you do it?*"

Kitty buried her face in My Lady's lap: "Oh, and did I do wrong? I was so wretched and poor, My Lady, and I'd never been to school and I wanted to go, and when he said if — if — O please don't ask me to tell it — now in my happiness and knowledge — now after I've prayed over it in tears and —"

I heard the door shut quickly — the door Justin was holding half open, and his face white and terribly strained with grief sank from my sight in the closing. But as a picture of suffering for the strong, it is framed in my mind always.

And My Lady's face and the Captain's — she leading Kitty off and Kitty clinging to her, white-faced and pleading: "Oh, don't send me away. I am not bad —" and the Captain biting his mustache savagely and saying:

*"By God — I would n't have believed it!"*

And when the *maestremare* wobbled down the by-path to her cabin, a cruel smile was on her lips and her short wheezy breath came in strange, hoarse sounds as Rowdy Boy's, when speeded with his broken wind.

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“She 'll be back to-morrow — she 'll be back, the hussy!” I kept hearing her say. “She 'll be quality no longer, an' I 'll make her name the laughing stock of the whole country. Her mammy had the wild blood in her. Like cat, like kitten.”

## CHAPTER XX

### THE BRAND OF THE THOROUGHBRED

It was too true, and bitter were the thoughts that filled my mind when I saw Kitty coming out of the Captain's house the next day (Uncle Jake carrying a little trunk of her things). On the porch she stopped and looked toward the schoolhouse, with the great dreaming dream in her eyes that I had learned to know from the corn rows of old. Then she looked toward the cabin where the *maestremare* stood waiting for her.

And there were kindly tears in My Lady's eyes as she bade her good-bye and said: "I am sorry, Kitty — my child — but we could not — we could not have you in our home now. Go back to your father and be good and brave and perhaps you can live it down. We will see that you have clothes and books and all you need. Oh, this is terribly unfortunate!"

Kitty could not speak, but kept looking toward the schoolhouse.

Then, My Lady, seeing, said, "Oh, no," and she shook her head. "Oh, no — they would not let you go there. The parents of the children must be very careful, you know. Oh, child, I am sorry for you! Go along now and come to me whenever you need anything."

But Kitty (though the heart had gone out of her eyes), held up her head in that reckless, daring, thoroughbred way, that now and then I had seen come over her (and moved me to fear that rashness and defiance would be

## The Brand of the Thoroughbred

hers at last), only walked away with her hand holding tightly the throat and that daring, reckless light in her eyes.

But out of sight, by the path in the woods, down on the snow she went, and I, in my pity, though only a dumb thing, seeing, of her own kind, there was none to mother her, sidled up myself, and whinnying, I nosed her sweet-smelling, rich hair, and even touched her young, warm cheek.

But it was hot and had no wetting on it as of tears that soothe; and though she turned her face upward to me and tried to smile, I could see that the light in her eyes was not the smiling light, when she said:

“Hal, you poor, lame thing! and to think that God gave his horses this and withheld it from his own. But I don’t care for what any of them think except —” and at sight of the schoolhouse in the woods, the tears that would not come before came to soothe her. I followed her to the cabin, her soft hand upon my nose.

“You’d better help get supper,” said the *maestremare*, without seeming to notice her particularly. “You’ll find everything just like you left.”

But I knew not then the far-reachingness of this false seeing of the Great Whites. It came when I saw their schoolchildren mock Kitty as she carried the heavy pail of water from the spring to the cabin the next day and then run from her as from one with the Great Plague. And of the older ones, women of the race, takers of snuff, and of scandal, passing in vehicles or on the back of horses and wagging their heads and saying as they looked toward the cabin:

“And the little baggage livin’ thar! Old McCrea’s gal. I knowed her mother an’ I knowed no good would come of her! Well, it beats all, and she just a gal; and you say

## The Gift of the Grass

it was that handsum Nettles man? La-la! Wal, the ways of men is strange. They both orter be tarred and feathered and run out. Sister, drive up or we won't be gittin' thar to meetin' in time to hear Brother Jones preach. That ar' sermon of his'n last meetin' on *cheerity* was gran'! I jes' felt myself goin' to the skes. La-la, *the little baggage!*"

And like as a thoroughbred branded with the mark of the ranch horse, so lived Kitty in the cabin.

And the bird songs had ceased and the glad voice had gone and only the eyes of the longing for something unknown, over the hills stayed with her, such as I had seen in the old, dead days, among the corn rows.

Then something happened which they understood not: closed was the little schoolhouse, for Justin had gone, and it was said that he left with no explanation and no word to any man. And those who would have stopped him would not speak when they saw the stern bitterness that was in his face.

And they said he had gone to the city to study law.

The next day, which they called the Sabbath (it being "the day in which they worship themselves and their good clothes and feed their stomachs with the big meal of the week," said Billy), I strayed off with Billy down by their church to see; and I heard them bring up Kitty before the Saints and condemn and utterly cast her out.

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE NIGGER HORSE

I DISLIKE to write this part of my life, it was so full of suffering and despair. My winters were terrible. I was hungry all the time, and but for the grass which groweth everywhere if it have but a chance, and which I then learned to know was the greatest gift of a Beneficent Great Cause, I had starved.

For this beautiful blue grass smiled up out of the earth into life long in the spring when all other things were still cold to the sleep of winter, and it stood up beautiful and bountiful, and life-giving even after the snow had come.

But for it I had starved, as I said.

Nor do I blame Jim. No one ever loved me as foolishly as did he. It was not his fault but, as Billy said, "The fault of his head — his head is different, Hal."

I was his pride and his pet. He 'd spend whole days rubbing me and blanketing me, until I was so sore I could not bear one to touch my tender skin, and he would put the heaviest blanket on me in the hot summer, and leave me without any, or shivering under an old rag, in the fiercest winter.

He neglected his crop to hang around me, rubbing me, bragging about me, until he himself almost starved with me. My little log stable was the loafing place for all the worthless negroes in the county, and here in the sun they would sit while Jim told them dope tales of how much

## The Gift of the Grass

money I was going to win for him in the future until every negro there wanted to own a race horse, and all of them quit work to go into the horse business.

Some even tried to train their mules to pace fast.

And all the time I was growing like a jack-bean; all in one direction and so poor and weak I had to lean against the side of the stable to stand up.

After a day of rubbing me and telling wondering-eyed negroes of my fine points (of which Billy used to laugh and say they were so fine and so very pronounced he could hang his hat on any of them), Jim would bring me a few nubbins of corn, give me a good-night pat and say: *"Now, be keerful, Hal! don't eat so much that you'll have the colic."*

Poor Jim! It was his head! His heart was all right. But I learned then by bitter starving that there was a vast difference between heads and hearts. And that the Black Man was not and could never be a Great White in a darker skin, for Bok had put bands on his head.

But for Billy and Reddy, as I said, I would have starved the first winter. For Billy stole corn from the others and brought it to me by night, and Reddy stole it from the Captain's stable and brought it by day.

And I could always depend on Jim for the nubbins. He'd bring them if he had to steal them himself.

But it did seem strange to me that Jim's mind always dealt in nubbins — never in his life did he bring me a full, big ear of corn.

"Ah!" said Billy, "that's the way with some races of people. I call them the nubbin-men. Their mind runs in nubbins. Jim came of the nubbin race. They were nubbins thousands of years ago and are nubbins now. They will be nubbins till the end of time. Among the Great Whites, the two-bit clerks, the fifty-dollar book-

## The Nigger Horse

keeper, the hundred-dollar preacher, the one-horse farmer, the shyster lawyer, the quack doctor, and the hack writer, are all nubbin men. But me and Bokefeller"—and Billy smiled proudly,—"we bore with a big auger for deep oil. We house only the big ears! Bah!"

I soon learned that being a nigger horse brought on me a degradation in a social way that was worse than starvation to a horse of my spirits and ambition.

On account of this nubbin-man tendency and the different head, also the smell and the tendency to loaf unwashed and always in the sun, unless they had a master, and to save nothing for a rainy day, the social line had been drawn with iron rules, lest the nubbin and the unwashed blood turn the pure white into yellow, and so mongrelize the race.

And so being a nigger horse I was a social outcast. Not a horse would associate with me—only the mules—and it did them the greatest good, especially Kate and Duplicate, to know that I had been degraded in life.

"Now you will be baptized, won't you?" they begged me time and again. "Now that you are one of us let Lamplighter get thee by the tail and baptize thee in the horse-pond and see how thy burdens will be removed—they will be purer than snow."

Weak as I was and degraded and starved, I stood up proudly and told them to go to Hulee!

But the Majah Sah and the Kunnal Sah, when sober enough, would pass me now and then and say:

"You Booker-jerked little nigger horse! Dinkey, can't you have him come over every mohning and oil our hoofs, and curry us off, and comb out our manes?"

The Lightfoots simply ignored me unless they wanted me to go on an errand and carry a horse note to another mare for them.

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My mother, my poor mother, was hurt most of all. She never spoke of me in good company, but wept often for me (as she said), and kept me encouraged by saying, "Never mind, Hal. You'll not be a nigger horse always. You'll be a blue ribboner yet!"

But Finger Tail encouraged me greatly. The Red Faced Man was riding him by one day, and when Finger Tail recognized me, he neighed, "Why, Hal,— a nigger horse! But don't give up, old boy. I was once a nigger horse; now look at me!" and he tried to canter but only crow-hopped and stumped his toes.

And the Red Faced One, when he saw me, almost fell off of Finger Tail, laughing:

"Oho! that's the Captain's *greatest pacer in the world!* Once a sheep-pony — always one."

## CHAPTER XXII

### I AM RIDDEN BY WITCHES

BUT starvation was not the only thing I suffered at Jim's hand.

He began to ride me when I was two years old. It is true, I was, by this time, a good, big, gangling, sloping-quartered colt, but I was poor and slim, though within me I carried a heart of fire which nothing short of death could stop.

Of course I ought not to have been ridden before I was three, even if well fed and strong, but — “Oh, well — his head is different,” said Billy again.

It was comical to see us — Jim's long legs reaching nearly to the ground and I, all fire and spirit, even in my poverty, flying with him down the lane, my tail streaming behind, my head up, and Jim the proudest negro in Tennessee.

And what rides he took me! Always when he started out (for he rode me every Sunday all afternoon and till way into the night), he would show off by riding me straight at the rock wall around the Captain's farm.

Poor as I was I would go at it like a bull dog, and jump it like a deer, Jim hurrahing and yelling from my back.

Then he would ride me many miles to the home of his lady love, the fat, Black Faced Damsel with white shining teeth.

Here my sufferings were truly severe, for in the coldest nights, Jim would hitch me to a post in the open yard,

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often in cold sleet or rain or snow. Here, to keep from freezing I would stand all night, pawing — pawing — pawing — while Jim courted his Black Faced One before a great warm wood fire.

It would be daylight before we reached home, daylight and no breakfast for me. Then he 'd grin and say to the Captain: "Marse Joe, you orter see how game Hal is! He pawed a hole out last night where I had him hitched, mighty nigh big enough to hide hisself in!"

But I imbibed from Jim another trait that has clung to me all my life, nor can I to this day throw it off! It was his belief in the supernatural and it got into my soul, in the strangest, queerest ways.

He would ride me for miles around a grave-yard for fear of meeting ghosts (spectral, airy, grave-smelling things he told me of), and when riding he would not dare to look back over his left shoulder for fear of seeing them. I became so afraid of ghosts from hearing him talk of them, that I began to shy at white objects on the road and to snort with fear if I met cows in the night, expecting to see them headless (as Jim told me ghosts often assumed that form), or to see them suddenly turn into men walking along holding their own ghostly heads under their arms.

One night, as we rode home, I heard a wind rushing by me and smelt a most sickening, deadly smell. (Billy afterwards told me it was only the wind blowing from the leeward side of Jim himself — but I knew better).

"Ghosts, Hal," cried Jim clapping his spurs to me — "we are in a reg'lar nest of ghosts. Good Gawd, they are bilin' like worms in a bunch! Run, Hal, run!"

I was in a snorting frenzy at this queer smell, and I hit the gravel at my fastest gait (and this is when I learned that I could pace faster than I could run), for I was so

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scared I had no time to study it out but just went the gait that would take me away from the nest of ghosts the fastest.

The next day Jim told the Captain how I could pace: "Marse Joe, he is oil in the can. For a while I thought I was a-straddle of a streak of rackin' lightnin'."

However, he thought he had better fix the ghosts against future interference, so he thrashed me unmercifully with the entrails of a hog, saying it was the only way to keep the ghosts away.

(Billy said he would much prefer the ghost smell to the way I smelt the rest of the week, and I was very sore from the beating.)

To keep witches from riding me he kept a silver bullet in his gun, it being the only thing that would kill a witch, while in my feeding trough he kept a little bag of dog's hair wrapped around a toad's foot. But for these he told me the witches would ride me some night, tangling my mane and tail with knots, and leaving me wind-broken and ruined. All this I believed as firmly as Jim, for Billy afterwards told me that was the trouble about being a nigger horse, that you not only smell like them, but learn to be like them, believing everything they believe.

"Why," said Billy, "the children of the Great Whites down here never get over their nigger ways and beliefs as long as they live."

But Billy's talk could n't dissuade me from believing the things I saw and felt as the following true account will explain.

One night, one mild, still, summer night, when I had been on the blue grass for a month or more and I was fat and in good fix, soon after the moon arose I began to feel very queer. It seemed that I heard voices talking miles and miles away, calling me, in queer, quaint, far-

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away tones. It strangely affected me and I would find myself off alone, my head up, listening.

Then I'd lie down to sleep only to see queer things in my mind's eye, dancing, and hear again the far-off voices calling, calling me.

There was a dim, misty moonlight. The leaves stirred ghostily among the trees, and the shadows of the hills seemed to hold something unknown and unattainable. I had wandered off from my kind and I did not want them to see me; for far away, out on the night, came those queer voices calling me, voices I seemed not able to resist, for I wandered on toward them into the dark, moon-flecked wood — into the shadows of the hills.

"Come back, Hal, come back," the other colts would say. "Come back, there is danger," but I heard them not. I was keyed like a fiddle string. I was afire with a wild desire to go.

An owl from a hollow tree laughed cynically at me and cried:

"*To-who? To-who?*"

"*To the voices! To the voices!*" I said; "*to the voices calling me, calling me to my kind.*"

At this a screech owl shivered with fear and warned me to go back; but I could not go — it was the voice of the night, the voice of fate, and I could not turn back, neither could I stop.

"Come, Hal, come — we wait — we wait thee!" and the demoniacal laughter and *ha-has* froze my blood.

Yet, on to them I went, for I knew that my soul was going through the long eons of the past, that it was part of that past even as it is of the present, never having died, but grown steadily up from a lower to a higher being, and in the next life might I not be a man, I thought weirdly?



With a wild plunge I went into the night in the  
maddest flight that ever colt took.



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To-night my soul was answering the spirit call of the spirit world — a world it had once lived in and would go to again.

Suddenly out of the woods, out of the air, out of space, small, unseen hands grasped me by mane and tail, and, at their fiery touch, the hair of me crinkled into twisted knots, as if from the touch of fire; while fearful, chuckling, demoniacal laughter echoed around me as when idiot children have found a strange toy.

I felt quivering, clammy legs clutching my back, and fiery, twisted fingers in my mane, and clucks and chuckles urging me on.

With a wild plunge I went into the night in the maddest flight that ever colt took, the demoniacal, unseen things upon my back clattering their queer *ha-ha* laughter to the pale moon.

Everything ran out before me — mules, horses, all gave me a wide road, all shouted: “*He is crazy — the Hal colt has run amuck. Give him room,*” and round the field I went, over stubble, fences, fallen trees, anything to shake off the unseen things, whose burning heels were in my ribs, and fiery fingers tangled in my mane.

Around the pasture I went, all the horses and mules pitying me, and all of them shivering and snorting with fear, for they knew not when their own time would come.

But I could not stop. Twice I fell to my knees — once I ran over Dinkey who got in my path to try to reason with me.

Somehow I felt that I was dying and these were the angels of death riding me till I fell dead. I am sure I had fallen dead if my mother had not, when they first began to ride me, suddenly run out of the pasture, and when I felt that I could go no longer, and my heart bursting within me, she came back bringing the white Witch Mule that

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lived on a neighboring farm. This mule was of extreme old age, and was called the Witch Mule because she alone could drive the witches from the back of those unfortunate horses they bestrode to ride to death.

At the sight of the white mule all the horses became quieter, and when the old mule reached the pasture she began her incantations. There were doleful brays of the witch song, telling the witches to desist, and then she selected a wild grape vine, running between two trees, over which she spat seven times and called to me to run under it.

This I did, when I felt all the weird witches scraped off, cursing me and the Witch Mule, and sneaking off into the forest laughing their derisive *ha-ha — ho-ho!*

The next morning when Jim found me wandering around the pasture, glassy-eyed, caked with sweat and stiff, he turned ashy and cried: "*Gawd-a-mighty — an' the witches got 'im at last!*"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### JIM'S LAST RIDE

BUT the very next week came a great change in life, so great that for a time I forgot all the love affairs of Kitty and Milly May.

It was Reddy Roost, who said, as he talked to old Jake that morning: "Better go by and see Jim. He's mighty sick — got pneumonia."

I could see the light in Jim's cabin all night, and many queer negroes coming and going, wagging their heads and looking very solemn. The next day the squire himself came to my stall-cabin and after looking me over he said to Reddy Roost:

"That fool negro is going to die — he has caught his death of cold riding around of nights, and he wants me to pay his funeral expenses and take back his Jonah of a horse — he is a fool about this colt."

He looked me over, shaking his head. "It will cost me twenty-five to bury Jim — a bad bargain — a bad bargain — but guess I'll have to do it."

I felt very sad at this. For three or four days I missed Jim. I did not know what it meant to die except that it turned Jim into a ghost (*spook-nagger*) a thing that we could not see but only smell, which, when I told Billy, not knowing Jim was so sick, he winked and said:

"Only smell them, heh? Well, Jim will hold the ghost record at that!"

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Then he said seriously, "Hal, it is a good thing to hold a record, even a ghost record. Now, you ought to know better than that. You horses and your fool religion and superstitions have kept your race from going on to higher things since the beginning of time. None of you have ever seen a *spook-nagger*, but you are liable to see *naggers*, *koitycuts*, *hippobutters*, and *nanny-gadders* all around you any day, and you 'd be a whole Hulee chance better off if you 'd keep your eyes skinned for the evil ones that would do you here, than imagine harm from creatures that do not exist, while worrying your silly heads about a life and a world as unsubstantial as air and based on the dream of a drunken ass who lives on your ignorance."

But all of Billy's talk could not get out of me the religion that had been bred in me from the earliest days of my kind, and the superstitions that Jim had made part of me in my youth.

I hated to admit it, but I believed as firmly in the ghosts as Dinkey, the little mule — as did Jim himself.

And the following proves I was right. A truthful tale, as I live and write it in my old age:

That night it came. I heard Jim calling me, afar off, just as I heard the voices before of the witches, and the spell was on me so that, scarcely knowing what I did, I broke from my insecure little log stall and went straight to his cabin door.

I saw the mourning negroes around his bed chanting their queer death songs. I saw Jim gasping, breathing, his ashen face, the dumb despair in his eyes. I put my head in his window and whinnied softly, saying:

*"Hail, Jim, and farewell,"* in my horse language.

And he, seeing, smiled and gasped: "Good-bye — good-bye — Hal — ho — ho — we 'll meet again. One more ride into the spirit land."

## Jim's Last Ride

There was a rattle in his throat, and Jim did not move again.

I waited till I saw them straighten him out and put the coins over his closed eyes.

I felt that I had lost my last friend. I knew then I loved him though his head was different.

The next night they buried Jim, for it seemed this was their custom, to bury their dead at night if the moon was shining, and forever branded in my memory is that weird scene.

I smelt them long before I saw them or heard them winding over the hills, for, as I said, our smell is the best ears and eyes we have. And faintly, to me, on the cool night wind, came that ghost-smell again.

But this time it was Jim.

Then came the swinging, swaying, rising, falling dirge of the mourners, now clear, now muffled and faint, as the procession passed from the open vale into the hollow of the hill.

Never had I heard such queer music.

I looked eagerly up the long road, and as the dirge burst out clear again, I saw the long procession.

At the head was the pure-blood old African woman called the Death Dame, whirling round and round in a circle as she danced before the corpse, chanting her strange mourning songs.

The running gear of a small wagon followed, Jim in a winding sheet tied across the hounds.

And behind, the long line of swaying, swinging mourners keeping step and time to their songs.

In an open dell they buried him, and when they left I could see the moonlight shining on his grave. Then the moon grew dimmer and gray darkness came from the shadowy hills and trees.

## The Gift of the Grass

But this letter from my sire comforted me:

### HORSE SENSE, BY TOM HAL

Ho, my son, for the words of thy sire and girt thy legs to the pace of them:

1. Throw off the curbs of thy past!
2. Fools cling to their folly, and the witless to the beaten highway. But be thou wise to seek the new road that leadeth to the life anew. Throw off the curbs of thy past.
3. Grieve not over things agone. Shed not tears for past errors. Let the penance of thy past shrive the dead of thy past and be thou the High Priest of thine own future. Throw off the curbs of thy past.
4. Live not to the heredity of bonds that are broken. See not the scars of cuts that have healed. If thy hide be still whole and thy feet still sound, thank Bok and set thy face to the Future. Throw off the curbs of thy past.
5. Shed yearly with thy hair thy views. Lose with thy teeth thy prejudices. 'T is the great sycamore that towers above the land to the sky, shedding yearly its bark that a greater may come. 'T is the scrub oak that sheddeth nothing. Throw off the curbs of thy past.
6. Wise is he who garnereth honey from the hornets' nest, and worthy of praise who followeth the sting of bees to the bee-tree. Throw off the curbs of thy past.
7. For the great murderer there is praise, and the rich thief liveth in the temples of the land; but the birthmark of the caste condemneth both the brow of the Genius and the cheek of Beauty. Throw off the curbs of thy past.
8. It is easy to shoe with gold thy hoofs that were naked, and a little dye will change thy hide; but difficult is the task of taking from thy soul the smell of thine ancestry. Throw off the curbs of thy past.

## Jim's Last Ride

9. Forget thou wert ever wronged; remember not that thou wert ill-used; think not of the days of thy scorning, for by taking thought of them they become part of thee, and having already had their setting by thy fireside, thou wantest them no longer as the guests of thy soul. Throw off the curbs of thy past.

10. In the race that thou shalt be called on to go, race not for the fame of it, but go thou for the love of the going. Then shalt thy life be sweet even unto the sleep and the forgetting. Throw off the curbs of thy past.

11. For it is a little race and soon over; 'tis a short pace and then weariness and the wind broken. And the grand-stand that cheereth thee to-day forgetteth thee in the cheers of the breaker-of-thy-record-to-morrow. Throw off the curbs of thy past.

12. Smile and do thy duty." Love the common of thy kind and help them from the mire. Pace the pace that is in thee and look not back. Throw off the curbs of thy past.

13. Shun not thy fate, though it be of fire. Glory rather in the broken tendon of a Great Race won than in the sound limb of the Doer of Naught. So shalt thou be a Star Pointer in the land.

Thy sire,

TOM HAL.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE DEATH OF THE MAESTREMARE

VERY patiently did Kitty work, doing the drudgery in the cabin of the *maestremare*. But it was not the Kitty of the bird-song, nor the one whose life seemed so happy but a little time before. Those of her own kind spoke not to her, but even the children wagged their heads and pointed their fingers toward her when she passed. Once, at twilight, when she had finished her work, I saw her slip up to the schoolhouse. And there with great yearning eyes and drawn face, she saw where she once was happy, and in her old place she sat and wept. And there was one little bit of poet-talk she kept repeating to herself, something she had once said on Friday afternoon, the day always set aside for child-talk in the school, and reciting things so well said by the poets of the Whites, and she said nothing so well as this (which seemed to be of her heart), for she repeated it again and again:

“ We never give, but giving, get again —  
There is no burden that we may not bear —  
Our sweetest love is always sweetest pain —  
And yet the recompense, the recompense is there.”

Nor would she go back to the cabin until once again she had gone down the old path that led to the Captain's home and under the trysting tree. And there were no tears in her eyes but the dry hardness of the *nagnumbness that kills*.

## The Death of the Maestremare

Then the daring and the steel came with the *nagnumbness*, and though I nosed her trying to get the face-pat of old, she noticed me not, but kept saying:

*“Life and the wheel of it. Who of us can turn it into words of our choosing? Who can stand up before the Thing that Is To Be? Not I!”*

Then she cried, and then she cursed it, cursed herself, and the life and the fate that was hers.

“I’ll fight it,” she cried bitterly, “it has fought me to the ditch. I’ll fight it to the gutter. God?—who can He be but a Great Santa Claus, a Giver of tinsel gifts to children, once a year, while they die and go down in sorrow for the withholdment when the morning comes?”

“Life—it has fought me, I will fight it!” she kept saying over.

And she went from the trysting tree with bitterness and daring in her heart.

At the stable door she laughed and tossed her great coils of hair back upon her shoulders. No one was about, and putting the bridle and saddle on Miss Lightfoot, who protested with rearing, plunging, and all manner of untamed ways, she mounted with a leap and rode her down the darkened lane like a wild thing.

In ten minutes I heard the hoofs of the thoroughbred flying patterning back, nor did her rider taut the rein until she bolted up to the barn door, and leaped to the ground, laughing and patting Miss Lightfoot’s neck. “Twas a gallop all right, Miss Lightfoot. I thank you—and—and—I am saner! It takes the fever and the curse of the bitterness out of the blood. Good-bye and—pray for me.”

Never before saw I Miss Lightfoot so pleased. “She has my own blood,” she said to her mother—“and the *nagnumbness* is hers. She may ride me when she chooses,

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for we are kindred spirits. But Mother — Mother — must they not have driven her to the last ditch — they, the Great Whites — to make her beg me, of the lower world, *to pray for her?*"

And silly as Mrs. Lightfoot was, I saw that it had touched her deeply. It was nearly midnight when Billy, who could not sleep (for he said he felt the working of a great power in him), came to me, waking me and saying:

"Get up, Hal, and let us wander through the pasture to the cabin of the *maestremare*. Something is doing there. I have seen light flashing to and fro, and Reddy has ridden Villette for a doctor, who came in haste some hours ago."

It was true — a glance when we came to the cabin told it.

"She is dying," said Billy — "the *maestremare*," and he butted me delightedly in the side. "We 'll take pennyroyal on that, Hal, when we get back. Look!"

But I would not look, for in spite of all she had done to Kitty, my heart took no delight in her suffering.

"Joke not about it, Billy," I said, "it is death — the thing that ends all jokes."

"And the same that turned Jim into a bad smell," laughed Billy derisively. "By Bok, won't she make a bad smell all right?"

He was silently listening. Then he said, seriously: "It is the greatest thing in the world, Hal — this Death. 'T is the creed of all creeds — 't is the only religion that 's true. See now how quickly He will unmask her hypocrisy and deceit. See how for once she will speak the truth. Mark her beg for forgiveness. See her try to undo her wrongs. Bah — Death is the Great Chief-Justice of life and love, the Great Balance Wheel of the universe, the Great Scale that never varies, the Great Leveler of the uneven, the

## The Death of the Maestremare

Great Oil upon the waters of lies, the Great Religion of us all!"

It was as Billy said. For the Long Voiced was there, but no comfort was he to her until, calling Kitty to her bedside, with tears and in her broken, gasping talk, she begged her to forgive her and even though dying, she made the Long Voiced write a letter to the Teacher and in it say: "*I lied — I lied — I lied!*"

But Kitty stood tearless and white-faced with something there that said *Too late*.

But Reddy, big hearted as he was, wept for the dying one. And she was not satisfied till they had read to Kitty the letter just as she had said it. And when the preacher said that he himself would take it to the hand that should hold it, the great *maestremare* smiled as no one ever saw her smile before and said:

"God has forgiven me, Brother, and if Kitty — would — forgive me —"

But Kitty stood tearless, and with the old pain in her eyes. And never to me looked she so noble or beautiful as then. "I forgive you — I forgive you," she said.

Billy turned off, disgusted, and stalked solemnly before me to the barn. Thoughtfully he chewed of his bitter weed. Long he was silent.

"Hal," he said at last, "this is the wonder of the Great White, and something no other animal has. However they may have lived in wickedness, however they may have strayed from the right, whatever they may have done of wrong and injustice, there is at last in all of them both a Belief and a Divinity. Hulee take it, but it knocks my theories into a battered tomato can! Now a goat is a bad goat, or a good goat, and a horse on the day he dies is the same as the day he was foaled, and a mule is a fool always and eternally, but the great wicked one of the

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man may turn at death's door and do the great good, and the liar and the hypocrite, at the touch of the belief and the divinity, may be the saint and the true one, and the fallen woman may be the purest, the beggar the richest, the unclean the cleanest."

"And 't is all because of the belief and the divinity."

I was silent, for I understood it not. And after partaking freely of pennyroyal, even Billy grew more cheerful, for he laughed and said:

"But they have one fine thing about their lying dead, and their rich, ungodly dead, and their cruel dead, and all their other dead: To-morrow they will nail the *maestrel-mare* up in a tight box and bury her six feet deep under the ground. And I, though I forgive her for doing the ruin she has done, I, even I, Billy, the Nervous Goat — I hope she will never rise again!"

## CHAPTER XXV

### I DISCOVER SUMMER-SKY-EYES

It was spring again, and I was a great colt, three years old, clean of legs and head, ribbed close up, and, as Billy said, "quartered like a bull-dog." For there was my driving power, in my great sloping hips, bunched so with muscle that they caused me to look ungainly. I was so powerful I could manage any horse in the barn. I was afame with life and strength, "an unpampered son of Nature, by Bok," cried Billy.

I had lived on the blue grass until its very life and strength had gone into my clean, flat bones, until they were as solid as the lime rock itself from whence, through the grass, they came. And my muscles, drinking in the juice of that upon which I lived, were elastic in their bending, but as drawn rawhide in strength. They were so alive that they seemed to burn me if I did not use them, and often I would play in the lot, standing upon my hind legs, pawing at the air above, or leaping across great ditches and fences for the fun of it. But most of all I loved to fly in the great, smooth pace of my breed and kind, causing the other horses to marvel at the stride of me. In playing around the pasture I would wheel as if in a race and score down at thundering speed, and Billy, when he measured my stride (that is, the distance over which one of my great hind legs swept from toe to toe) would say:

"Twenty feet, Hal, but that 's stepping some! I told

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thee thou wert built for speed! No," he would add, reflectingly, "no, Hal, thou art not pretty, nay, nor even handsome. But let it not bother thee, for the pretty male is never noted either for his brains or his courage. Ay, Hal, Bok has done much for thee. Do thou something for him — *be a horse!* Thy life has not been a *hippo-hitee*, nor a pink lemonade. Bok has tested thee with sleet and fire, with cold and with hunger, at times. But 'twas for thy good, and it has made thee the great gaunt son of Nature thou art."

But the Lightfoots said I was coarse and the Majah Sah said I lacked finish. And the mules, while they called me *Boss* to my face, had not the respect for me they had for the Majah Sah, and behind my back I was a *po' white hoss*, or as we call them, a *hippo-hemphead*. And yet no one seemed to take any notice of me or my great strength and speed. Now and then the Captain would ride by, glance at me and say I was a *fair saddle colt!*

Jack rode me regularly in attending to his own farm and the Captain's; but Reddy, who had grown into a strong, half-grown man, going to school in the winter and working in the summer, not only said I was the greatest colt alive, but after breaking me to harness himself, told him I had more speed than all the barn put together. And it was he who was always riding me, petting me, giving me apples, and laughing, saying, he would yet beat the Captain out of me.

One day there camped near us a lot of people whom Reddy called Gypsies, though they were little else than cheap horse traders or *hippo-fixers*. Their tents were filled with a sad mixture of women of dark eyes and little apparel and children of all kinds.

They camped near us, by a large spring, and soon there were many people trading with them.

## I discover Summer-Sky-Eyes

And here it was that my inquisitiveness, or what we horses call *mare-minding*, got me into what Billy used to say was "the butt-end of a bad fix."

For I went down to the fence to watch them and learn of their ways. Then I saw one of the children of them, a girl of some twelve grass-times, so different from the others that I wondered. For she had eyes of summer skies and locks of its sunset, whereas the Gypsy children were all dark and eyed like the gloom of a starless night. This gazelle-like creature of summer days (whom they kept dressed in tinsel and show-gowns that she might dance and take in the money of the strangers) came instantly across the field to me, and stood looking in half wonder and sorrow, as if something long forgotten was on her mind dawning, or as if she were trying to remember things long since gone. Suddenly it came to her, and up to me she ran, tiny tears in her eyes, and her voice quivering. She fondled the end of my face with her tiny hands and kept saying: "*Jock — Jock — pretty Jock!*"

In the first good smell of her I instantly knew, for I stood in the full current of the Gypsy camp, the wind coming to my nose in strong waves of their smell, a smell pungent with garlic and the sweat-smell and of sawdust and tinsel.

But the smell of Summer-Sky-Eyes (as I instantly named the gazelle-like little one) was different — so different that I knew she was not theirs. I knew it as well as that I know a mule is not a horse or a sheep a goat. For as I have said, our nose is the keenest knowledge-finder we have, and so sensitive that we know even the different smell of different men themselves. How beautiful she was and how I pitied her. For at sight of me I saw she thought I was her old *Jock* (whoever he was), *the horse she knew before the Gypsy stole her!* I knew

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it all instantly, for it is the smell that counts. I saw her trying to remember — hesitating, the tears running down, but rubbing my nose against her cheek and saying softly, "*Jock, Jock, pretty Jock! O take me back home! I remember you now, Jock, though I had forgotten all till I saw you — O Jock!*"

But even as she spoke a scowling, dark-faced woman, with frazzled mane and cruel eyes, came running to us from the camp and, seizing her by the arm, struck at me with a staff and dragged Sky-Eyes back saying:

"*Whatta you do there, Terio — come back!*" Viciously she drove me away, Sky-Eyes looking back at me and crying: "*'Tis Jock! O, I remember, 'tis Jock! And mamma, I remember, Teresa — I remember my mamma!*"

But the woman, Teresa, only threatened to beat her and pulled her into the camp, and I heard her screaming to a beating. Some of the men then came out and looked at me. I saw them wagging their heads and glancing me over with their keen, cruel black eyes. In them was delight at my great good points (for they instantly knew, being the shrewdest kinds of *hippo-fixers*).

I did not like their looks, so kicking up my heels in their faces (which is our strongest action of contempt and disdain), I paced across the pasture in my long strides. But I saw that it only made them admire me more by their jerky laughter and nodding of heads to one another.

Imagine my surprise when, at a safe distance, I stopped near the small lot in which the Gypsies were camped with their mules and horses, to hear Gray Lize say:

"Come nigh, Hal, I would speak with you."

Seeing she was tied by the neck with a huge yoke which she dragged wearily (as I afterwards saw the white man's convicts drag a great ball and chain) and could not get

## I discover Summer-Sky-Eyes

away, I went up to the fence where she stood, poor, half-starved, and showing evidence of a bad lameness she was just getting over.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, for when I saw her last she was fat and slick, and I knew that the Red-Faced One, though cruel, never starved his stock.

"O, Hal, I have treated you like a dog, but see if you cannot help me to get away from these cruel *hippo-fixers*! Two weeks ago I was a fat mule in Master's lot — now see me lean and hungry, tied to this yoke to keep me from going back, and worst of all, I have been so lame in one leg I can hardly work. It is I who must haul wearily that great wagon with the top. It is killing me — I am dying."

She was a pitiful sight, and, though she had been my *nagger* all my life, I am glad to say I had nothing but pity for her.

Between her tears Gray Lize told me how it had been done, and from her I had my first knowledge of a trick of the *hippo-fixers*.

It seems that a month before, when they first camped in our parts (then a mile or two farther off than their present camp), one of them slipped into Gray Lize's stall one night and tied beneath the hair of her right fore foot and just over the ankle, a strand of horse hair. She thought they were going to steal her, but they were too wise for that, and after smoothing the hair of her ankle back over the horse hair, which was tight around the skin, they left her alone. She could not get it off with her teeth, it could not even be seen, and for a day she did not feel it. But soon the leg began to swell, the circulation being partly cut off, and then such pain as she had, the hair cutting into the swelling flesh. In two days she could only hobble on three legs, while the Red-Faced One and Mr. Nettles, and even a *bok-butcher* or horse doctor, failed to

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find it, but thinking it a bad swelling, blistered it cruelly, making it worse.

"And all the time," said Gray Lize, "that terrible strand of hair was cutting into my swelling flesh. In a week Master gave orders to kill me, my whole leg being swollen to my shoulder, and nothing did me any good. It was then the sneaking *hippo-fixers* came, pretending to try to help Master find out what ailed me, and for a small sum they bought me from Master. They dragged and hauled me to their camp, and that night, knowing my trouble, they stuck a keen knife blade into the place, cutting the thread of hair and taking it out and bathed my leg with a cooling liniment. In a week I was nearly well and have slaved it to their great wagon ever since. O, Hal, if you know any way, help me. Tell them Master was cheated of a good mule and I of a good home — I am being worked to death. See my sores," and the poor thing was indeed a pitiful sight.

She told me to beware of them and not let them lay hands on me. That this was only one of a hundred of their *hippo-fixing* tricks. "There," she whispered, "look out! they are coming! I have done you wrong, Hal, but Bok is paying me back in my own coin."

Seeing the two men slipping along the fence, as if trying to get close to me, I again kicked up my heels in their face in contempt and flew off in my long pace, at which they stood looking in great admiration. I soon forgot Gray Lize, feeling that she had at last caught what was coming to her; but I could not help thinking about Sky-Eyes. I could not eat the sweet grass. How I wish I had not been dumb.

That afternoon, still worrying about it, I slipped down the fence near the woods in which their camp stood. But I saw no Sky-Eyes. Instead I was hailed with a volley

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of stones and many oaths, by men near the fence and their dogs were set upon me. Wheeling, I darted back home, pacing as I had never paced before, a great black vicious dog persistently following at my heels, snapping at me in the wild rush for home. I was just thinking I would have to turn and defend myself when I heard a rush and "*Let everybody bee-have*," and Shep covered him like a blanket.

It was the prettiest dog fight I ever saw, for the black fellow was as big as Shep, and had in him the bull of his kind, but the long hair of Shep got into his mouth and teeth, and he could not take hold good, and Shep had his old hold under the throat. Over and over they rolled, clinched, while I stood helpless, wanting to strike but fearing I would strike Shep.

It ended with Shep on top and the wheezing breath of the black dog coming in gasps, and though he was too game to beg for mercy, as did the Bloodletters, I knew he was suffering terribly, and that Shep's great choking grip and teeth would soon end him.

Seeing this, Shep, noble dog that he was, growled through his clenched teeth:

"*Booker-skin you, have you got enough, Blackguard?*"

"*Nuff — nuff*," the Black One just could gasp.

Shep got off of him very sedately and solemnly said:

"*Then go back to your kind and b-e-e-have. Come not again on this kingdom of mine — keep off of mine and I 'll keep off of thine* — you know the law of the land!"

The Black One, terribly cut up, and bleeding and thoroughly whipped, began to go off, but with apologetic looks, for he knew he had been in the wrong. Seeing it, Shep added:

"*I 'm sorry — sorry for you, Blackguard — but it was my duty. Let everybody bee-have — and that means you,*

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too, Hal," and he nipped my heels till I was glad to hurry to the barn.

He followed me, laughing in his jolly bark, jumping up and kissing me on the nose now and then and in fine spirits because, as he said: "I had such a jolly, rattling fight, old man. But let me warn thee, Hal," he added, assuming his preacher tone again, "go not near that crowd again. I smelt even in this dog the smell of the thief and the throat-cutters. Smell dog — smell master. *Let everybody bee-have.*"

But even as he said it, we heard a distant calling for me, and I turned to see Summer-Sky-Eyes running across the pasture towards us. Over the grass she flew like the fleet barefooted deer, her sunset hair like that of flimsy clouds in the purple twilight, floating behind her.

Toward us and the barn she was running, and then behind her came two of their men, running for their life, and though silent and with set teeth they were trying to catch her, but made no waste in the catching.

On she flew towards us crying: "Oh, Jock, Jock, save me!"

I saw Shep's hair flash maddingly up along his spine as he saw the two dark, cruel ones chasing the fleet and frightened one, and he seemed to forget himself as he rushed past her, his eyes blazing in a madness I had never seen before, and growling savagely: "*Let everybody bee-have.*"

I heard another shout as Reddy, now nearly grown and as tall and as strong, gaunt and sinewy for his age as I for mine, came riding up on a pony (for he was going to hunt some lost cattle of the Captain's in the creek bottom).

The two men stopped when Shep barred their way with exposed teeth and low, fighting growl, and then occurred

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a pretty sight, for as Reddy leaped from his pony, Sky-Eyes rushed into his arms crying: "*Save me, I am not theirs — I know now!*"

But almost instantly two other men and their women came up, and while the women seized Sky-Eyes and tried to drag her away, the men attacked Reddy.

Then it was that there was a glorious mixing, the memory of which warms my heart to this day in the telling of it.

Hardly knowing what it all meant, for a time bravely Reddy stood facing them with one arm around Sky-Eyes, who clung to him and saying: "*Stop there, what does this mean?*"

Then two of the men rushed at him, seizing the girl, and answering nothing. And then Reddy tossed Sky-Eyes behind him and one of them struck at him, but almost instantly he caught Reddy's great fist under his jaw and being light and of small height, he seemed to turn handsprings backward and lay on the grass utterly indifferent, so far as he was concerned, to what followed.

Almost instantly Reddy was faced by a dozen others, and their vicious, clattering-tongued, loose-mannered wives, who had come running up, men drawing small daggers, and the women seizing Sky-Eyes and dragging her away.

And before we knew it, or could overcome our great surprise, they had slipped away, but with many backward glances of sullen madness and carrying the little one who still did not seem to take interest in things.

And no sound came from Sky-Eyes, for their hands were over her mouth.

We stood our ground dazed, the hair still standing like a great whelk down the back of Shep, his eyes fierce and angry. But he was watching Reddy and like him knew. "Hold, Shep," Reddy said at last, catching the dog's

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eyes, "you are a wise dog. They would have cut us to pieces, unarmed as we were. Down, boy, we will settle them yet!"

Then he was quiet awhile, thinking.

"That is not their child. We must act quick. I will see the Captain and the Squire and get a constable at once," and jumping on his pony I saw him galloping towards the house.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### STOLEN

It was soon quite dark, and I could see lights flickering about in the camp of the *hippo-fixers*, as if there were unusual movement among them. I was greatly excited and could not throw off the fear, and felt for Sky-Eyes, smelling so plainly that she was not their own, and knowing how her mother must be heart-broken at her not coming home any more. Impatiently I walked around, my heart beating quick within me. I knew that Reddy would do something; but it being now night, and he having far to gallop to see both the Squire and the Captain, I did not think he could get back in time.

An hour passed — two — and so impatient I grew, seeing the lights moving, and smelling across the field, wind-blown, the strange odor of many mixed things, and hearing faint murmuring sounds as of a caravan preparing to move, that I resolved to go half way through the woods, despite Shep's warning. Another reason why I went, was, that by going up on a little hillock I had thrown my nose very keenly into the wind of their doings, and though I could detect their own smell and that of their dogs, horses, and cattle, I could not detect the sweet smell of Sky-Eyes. But turning slightly my nose, I detected her very faintly in the woods to my right, and I struck out boldly, following the scent of her, which came at first so faintly, but grew stronger and stronger as I followed it through the woods. It was so dark I could see only a few yards

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ahead, but here my better sight — my nose — stood me in great need.

Quite easily it guided me up to her, hid in a thicket, crouched close to the ground, frightened and cold.

*“Jock, it is Jock — dear Jock,”* she cried when I went up to her, nozzling her cheek to let her know it was I — *“dear Jock,”* she said, ever so low, *“you have come to me again — though I was trying to get to you, and I have run away, and they are hunting me, Jock; they are fearful of trouble now knowing it is known that I am not theirs. They are moring. They had me tied, but I cut the ropes and ran away. For I know now, Jock, I know I am not theirs, and seeing you again faintly I remember my own mother — so different from Teresa — the cruel one. O Jock, take me to my home again! It seems years since I was there!”*

And thus she talked to me as if I were human, and being dumb I could only whinny softly and rub her cheek.

But even as I bent over her some one threw a choking rope over my head. I heard Sky-Eyes cry out as a black-haired man and woman seized her, clapping their hands over her mouth and dragging her away.

I was choked down with the slip-knot of the rope, and when I got my breath again was haltered strongly:

*“Ho! damma! we gotta you!”* I heard one of the men say, and they led me through the bars to their wagons. Every thing was packed for a journey. They tied me to the new wagon and though I pulled back lustily and tried to break away I could not break the strong rope.

Madly I plunged until the black-haired one came and plied his smarting, burning whip to my side and flanks, and, stinging under the punishment, I had nothing to do but to go or be dragged along.

I thought of Master, of Billy, and my good home. *“What a hippo-meddler you have been, and served you*

## Stolen

right!" I said to myself. "And just as life looked the brightest — just as you had broken into good society! If Reddy only knew!"

I was tied to the rear covered wagon, and in it I smelt Sky-Eyes. She was also tied, one of her pretty limbs to the standards of the wagon, and cruel was the beating she had gotten — but much pleased she seemed to be to know that I, too, was going with her; and, since she could not sleep, she would now and then put her thin, tapering and beautiful hand out from under the cover and say: "*Jock — Jock — dear Jock! I am content since you are with me!*"

And I forgot myself in wanting to stand by her.

All night long our journey led southward, and we covered many miles. It was nothing to me, strong and full of life as I was; but it was a terrible drive on the poor mules which pulled their heavy covered wagons, and the broken-down, sad-eyed horses, which followed their caravan, and were afflicted with all ills but patched up to be traded.

And hauling the heaviest of the wagons was Gray Lize, begging that she might die. On, on we rumbled all night, until the great yellow stars sank in the west and from the east flamed the rays of the sun, starting the songs and flutter of birds in the woods around us, and turning into gleaming gems the soft dew pendent on the points of the leaves.

By a large spring on the margin of the road they stopped for breakfast, the fluffy, scowling, and ill-dressed women coming out from covered wagons to make fires and cook, the men to unhitch and give their animals a hasty bite, the children, half asleep, crying, and hungry. These, like bedraggled mice, crept out from their beds in the wagon at the smell of breakfast.

## The Gift of the Grass

But Sky-Eyes they did not set free but kept her tied to the wagon. And she of the coarse hair, they called Teresa, brought her only bread and water and talked to her with menacing gestures in the language of their kind. But Sky-Eyes, seeing me, took hope in her eyes for I saw it there. I knew from her pat upon my nose when they looked not, that she had hopes, when before she had none.

Young, strong, and of the earth and of fire, I alone of all of them was not tired. When they came near me with their dark looks and their ill-smelling clothes, I would snort as if in terror, quivering and showing the great muscles of my clean limbs, and the men of them would gather around me with nodding, approving heads, and looks of great satisfaction.

And when they would leave, "*Jock — dear Jock, stay with me,*" and a pat upon my nose, would come from Sky-Eyes.

Then there was talking among them, and putting of heads together, and a hasty hitching up of yokes again, and onward we started. But this time the caravan divided, the main part going still southward; but my wagon, in which were Teresa and two stalwart men and Sky-Eyes, struck out in another direction.

I knew instantly what it meant. They suspected pursuit, and the main caravan, with its plain track, would go on down the main road. But I, who was stolen, and Sky-Eyes who was not theirs — we should be slipped off by another route.

As we started off I caught a familiar whiff in the bushes to my right, and turning, I saw Shep crouched in the bushes and watching us. He had followed their trail all night, and now he had seen the way our wagon was going. He wagged his tail encouragingly and happily at me when he saw that I saw him, and with a low bark, which told me

## Stolen

to be of good cheer, I saw him slip off and in a long trot with tail and head down, start back for home.

The main caravan struck to the main road going south. But we were headed eastward, going straight through the woods, following an old, unused road, that led into the heart of the woods. All day we steadily drove until Gray Lize, her mate, and another mule almost dropped in the road. Fiercely and furiously they drove her, and I could see they were sorely afraid, for they kept looking back with many oaths and much fear. On, on, they drove the two mules, and at twilight unyoked them for the night.

But all the time Sky-Eyes was tied, though the rope gave her full space to move about at will. And she was happy, for she kept saying:

*“Jock! Jock!”* ever so softly.

I shall never forget the grim, gray daylight that came with the next morning, the mist that lay over the woods, the drip, drip, from soggy leaves, the gloom and despair that was in my heart, as I saw the Gypsies rising early, bestir themselves, and with angry looks at the sleeping Sky-Eyes, shake and awake her to the hardship of another day. Nervous, quick, and sullen they were, peering about them into the woods as if expecting a surprise; for Blackguard, their dog, who had been of our company, and whose nose I dreaded more than I did theirs, kept growling low and circling the woods with his keen nose uplifted.

When he came back to the fire, the hair stood in a row down his back and his growls were low and warningly given. One look at the dog and they prepared to move instantly. The breakfast was abandoned, everything thrown hastily into the wagon, and the mules geared quickly. Then I saw them in a group talking sullenly

## The Gift of the Grass

and with terrible, cruel glances at Sky-Eyes. And the black-haired man came over where Sky-Eyes was bound to the wagon near me and drawing his keen knife, told her that they were followed, but if they were taken he would kill her first. I could understand it all so easy, and Sky-Eyes, pallid, looked only to me, crying softly:

*“O Jock, O Mother, shall I see you no more?”*

Even while I wondered what to do, the old desperate dare-devil spirit that I felt in the raid of the Bloodletters — the Great First Instinct of saving self, came to me. I saw the black dog spring out fiercely toward the woods, I heard Shep's low growl and his taunting call to the black one for the death fight.

In an instant they mixed in savage fight, the black going under beneath Shep's weight and the old death grip on his throat. Then I heard Teresa shout to the Black-Haired:

*“Killa her, killa her first, quick!”* And I saw his dagger gleam as he rushed at Sky-Eyes.

To the end of her rope she sprang, even to my side. I felt a sharp pain in my great leg, near the big tendon that ran over my hock, and in fury and madness I struck at the call of my blood and my breed. I saw Reddy with pointed gun in one hand cut the rope that bound Sky-Eyes while she sobbed on his breast:

*“Buddy, Buddy, O you have come, too?”*

And Reddy humored her, saying: “Yes, yes, your brother, dear little one. But don't cry, you are safe.”

And then the picture came, so quiet and clear, even after years I see it all: Sky-Eyes sobbing in Reddy's arms, Shep standing over a black dog who lay whining, cut up and cowarded. Behind him with gun held on the woman and the other man, stood the Captain, Jack, and the Sheriff. And very quietly from the Captain:

## Stolen

"Throw down those daggers or you are a dead lot!  
Now bind them, Jack, and we 'll take them to jail."

It was all done so quietly and coolly, and yet it was all so terribly real, I had not felt my own wound till I heard Reddy say:

"Now sit down, little sister. I must look after Hal. If that devil had n't stopped to hamstring him, he would have killed you."

He came up, patted me, and then wiped the blood from my leg: "A nasty cut, but he missed the tendon — you are all right, Hal —" and he patted me again. "You are all right," he went on, "and say, old boy, that kick! it saved me from killing him. Look!" to the Captain — I looked, too, and have been sorry since, for never has it left my mind — the terrible cruel murderous scowl graven by the hand of death forever beneath a crushed skull of the one who would have hamstrung me and killed Sky-Eyes.

Then the Sheriff and the bound prisoners and wagons that went ahead, and the Captain caressing Sky-Eyes and trying to jolly her to forget, but she timidly shrank from him and clung to Reddy, stroking his face with her tiny hand and even kissing him in her childish joy.

"I have missed you so, Buddy," she said. "I thought you would never come! I remembered you when I saw Jock last night — and mamma — oh, shall I not see her soon? I have cried my heart out for her so many years!"

The Captain's eyes were moist, but he tried to smile as he asked: "Who was your mamma, and what was her name?"

But Sky-Eyes could not remember her own name nor her mother's; but faintly she recalled that she lived in a great house near other great houses near a park, in a far-away city.

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“Stolen,” said the Captain to the others; “I shall advertise and try to find her parents. In the meanwhile we will take her, my wife and I. And if we never find your mamma,” he said to her, “you shall have a mamma in my house.”

But this only made Sky-Eyes cry and declare she would never leave Reddy, and she clung to Reddy the closer, calling him “Buddy.” At last, after much talking, and petting of Sky-Eyes to quiet her, the Captain said, laughingly: “Reddy, I’ve been thinking — they shall both be yours — the girl and the Hal colt. You have won them; and, besides, she will go to no one but you. Kitty will be glad to help care for her, and My Lady and I will stand by you.”

All of which tickled Reddy and made Sky-Eyes laugh.

What a ride it was home, Reddy and Sky-Eyes both on my back! Sky-Eyes behind, clinging to Reddy, whom she would not leave for me one minute.

Kitty met us at the cabin door, smiling and full of wonder.

“Here’s our little sister, Kitty,” said Reddy, “we have taken her from the Gypsies.”

Then in a low voice he told all and that they were sure she had been stolen from some mother who had probably died of grief by now.

That night I was never so happy, in a clean and comfortable stable of my own, and Reddy came out three times before he went to bed to pat me and say: “Hal, Hal, you’re mine, think of it! And the Fair, the great Fair comes off in Nashville in October. There’ll be forty thousand people there the day you race for that thousand dollars they’ve hung up for the best three-year-old, trot or pace. We’ll go into training to-morrow, Hal, but we’ll not say anything about it — nothing except to Jack, who is going to let us train on his track.”

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I did not understand fully what he meant, but after Sky-Eyes had been put to bed in Kitty's own little clean bed, I heard the brother and sister talking seriously with their heads together, and Reddy said: "Oh, we can take care of her, Birdie; now that I've got the colt!" Then he whispered: "There's a thousand dollars up at the big State Fair, trot or pace. And listen, Birdie, he's a pacer — there's nothing like him ever come down the home-stretch before. You'll see — they'll all see it — like the world sees every big thing, man or horse or principle — *after it's done!* The thing is to see it first — and we're seeing it first. Oh, no, Birdie; we'll not give her to the Captain — honest, I'll take care of her — honest, I will. Give me just two months — me and Hal. We'll take care of her. Come," he said, going to the bedside where Sky-Eyes slept, "look what a sweet little thing she is — somebody's darling, like the old poem says. Think of the cruel life they've led her, beating, starving her, stolen from home so long she's forgot it all but me and an old hoss, and me and the old hoss ain't going to go back on her now. Why, it 'ud kill her, Birdie. No, no, the Captain nor nobody shall have her, she's mine — why, she thinks I'm her brother — now would n't I be a welcher to give her away?" And big and rough lad that he was, he stooped and kissed the little Sky-Eyes as she slept.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### I GO INTO TRAINING

AND now began days to me full of happiness and never-to-be-forgotten. In a clean little stable I lived near Reddy's house, and such care I had from his hands! I was kept apart from all the horses and not any of them knew I was being trained for the great race. For Reddy was now a big, strong, young man, and quiet and wise in his ways; and, as I saw, a natural born *nag-knower*.

Under his care I lost my uncouth shape, and my flesh became hard and smooth, my body long, sinewy, and muscular, my hair like silk, and my legs clean and hard. Very slowly and carefully Reddy went about my training, jogging me to his cart down the cool lanes, until I learned to know all his ways and could tell by the touch of his hand on the lines just what he wished of me.

One day he took me over to Jack's little half-mile track for my first work-out, and I shall never forget the strange, thrilling feeling I had when Reddy turned me for my first score down. My blood seemed a-fire with the spirit of going. The track, glistening in the sun, seemed to me the most beautiful road I ever had trod, and I felt the wild call of going in my blood. Like the dun chimney swift that flashed above me, twittering in flight, down the track I sped, going in the long stride of my tribe, and when I flashed under the wire and was pulled to a standstill, Jack and Reddy talked wonderingly and braggartly about me till my head was dizzy with pride of myself.

Twice each week he worked me thus. Each time, as I

## I go into Training

learned my stride and my steadiness increased, he took the weight from my shoes, until I became so perfectly balanced that I required nothing on my feet but the lightest of steel plates.

Billy would come over every day and hang around my stable, and when I would tell him what they said of my wonderful speed, he'd say: "I told you it would come to you thus, Hal, but be careful how you take it yourself; for a genius that is stuck on himself is the skin-jerkedest nuisance that ever came down the pike."

But satisfied beyond my dreams as I was with my life as it then ran, Reddy seemed even more so. And it was beautiful to see the devotion that was between him and Sky-Eyes, whom he called Little Sister. Often when he jogged me on Jack's track, sitting in the cart with him would be Sky-Eyes, as proud of me as was Reddy, and when he housed me in the cool stable after I had been rubbed down and blanketed, and the clean bracing bandages wrapped round my legs, and my feet packed with the wet clay which kept them cool and moist, they would sit on the camp stools, under the eaves of my home and talk. Then Reddy would tell her all about the wild flowers which grew in the fields and the names of the birds, and show her their nests often with the fledgelings in them. And he would take her with him in the field when he went to cut the tender corn which gave me such a great desire to eat; and often, bareback, he would toss her upon me, and when I felt the clutch of her slender hand in my mane, very proudly and easily would I glide in my slow pace down with her to the water trough and back.

And always I was *Jock* to her, *Jock* which she knew before she left the great city and the beautiful home and the sweet-faced lady whom she called *Mamma*.

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"Can't you think right hard," said Reddy to her one day, "and tell me the other name of your mamma?"

Then Sky-Eyes would think with her little forehead wrinkled: "No, Buddy, I can't. I remember you and Jock because I've found you; and I am sure I'd remember Mamma if I saw her, and Papa also — he was so tall, and used always to toss me up so high it took my breath away so queerly," and she threw a pebble high in the air to show him.

"But I was so little," she said. "It is all so hazy — as a dream one has had. But I do remember the first night with those cruel people and the beating I got because I cried for Mamma."

"The Captain has advertised everywhere," said Reddy, "and the chances are we'll yet find her, Little Sister, and then you'll be leaving us," he said with ever so sad a droop in his voice.

Then Sky-Eyes laughed and hugged him around the neck: "Leave you and Jock? No — no — they would have to take us all together!"

But as happy as Reddy and Sky-Eyes were, it was different with Kitty. She saw no one of her kind and they sought not her. Beautiful beyond words of mine to tell it she had become, but sad withal, sad; but now and then such wild and reckless things she would do, such as stealing out the Captain's Mrs. Lightfoot by night and riding to hounds with Mr. Nettles and others of his wild friends. And they said of all dare-devil riders she surpassed them all, taking fences and ditches in wild leaps, and so beautiful and with such a voice could she sing their hunting and drinking songs that, had she permitted them, she would have had every one of them at her feet, even Nettles himself. Of her own kind and sex, none would speak to her; and often have I seen her pass them in the lane or the

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highway near our home, and surpassing them so greatly in beauty she would hold high her head and scorn them with such beautiful scorn.

“What care I,” she would say to herself, “whether they speak to me or not! I have but to nod my head and take their lovers from them.” Then very bitterly would she say with hot tears in her eyes: “They will yet live to know how they have wronged me, and yet live to see the day when I shall be a greater lady than any ever in this narrow neck of the woods!”

Of all the handsome and wild young men of the county, only one would she go with alone, and that surprised me greatly, seeing that he alone had brought all her trouble upon her. But the power which Mr. Nettles seemed to have over her was what we horses call *hippo-hydra*.

Nothing made Reddy so mad as this, and he would threaten, scold, and almost fight. But Kitty would only laugh and kiss him, and I saw in it all what Reddy saw not; that not was she in Nettles' power, but that she had him in hers and gloried in it as do females, who, having suffered from others, now determine that they should all suffer in turn. And so, guarding herself and showing him no favors but the beauty of herself and the fascination of her company, she held him aloof until such time as she might need him for his money and the social chance he would give her.

And she would do that though she loved the Teacher — would do it to spite him for quitting as he did.

And yet she still loved the Teacher, for did I not see her one moonlight night, when Sky-Eyes and Reddy were asleep, steal by my stable and go to the schoolhouse where once she and the Teacher loved, and sob her heart out under the dark cedars where once he kissed her?

And yet how strangely she acted a few days after that

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when the Teacher himself came, and would see her. For he had received a letter from the Long Maned One, who wrote it as he had promised the dying *maestremare*. And this letter so moved the Teacher that he journeyed far to see her and beg her to forgive him for doubting her, and to be to him what she once was.

But though her heart was broken at the sight of him, in scorn and indifference she met him, and when he tried to speak to her and explain, pale, but defiant, pallid but almost fainting at the sound of his voice, she passed him by with a reckless laugh and rode off in a buggy with Mr. Nettles!

For a moment the sturdy, strong face of the Teacher blanched white, then very quietly he turned his face back to the town.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### HOW I LEARNED TO SWIM

AND now things began to happen so thick and fast that I am not sure that I can tell them in their order. For of all my life this was the most stirring. One week in the early fall there came days of hard rain, so that the streams were all very high, and the track so wet that Reddy could not even jog me on it. When I did not get my exercise my muscles just seemed to burn me and I would fret and pace up and down in my stall. I was very thankful then when Jack came once to my stall and told Reddy he would ride me down to Sinking Creek and kill a few squirrels. He wore his hunting coat and carried a small rifle in his hand.

"I know he is the fastest pacer living," said Jack, admiringly, as Reddy led me out, "and I've heard you bragging about his saddle gaits. So if you'll put the saddle on I'll give him a little exercise, since we can't jog on the track to-day."

I liked Jack and was very anxious to show off my saddle gait, and as we went along I fox-trotted beautifully. But he seemed to be thinking of other things and did not notice me, so I pretended to shy and struck a single foot to let him know just what I could do. But he jerked me roughly and stopped me, saying: "None of that! do you think I'd let you mix your gaits and spoil that great pace you've got? If you can't fox-trot, why, walk, sir."

He rode along thinking. I saw squirrel after squirrel leap from the limbs of trees in the deep wood by the

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road-side, or run across the soft leaves and up the big trees to their holes; but Jack saw them not.

His life and spirit seemed gone.

He was silent and the Bitter Thought was in him. I was very careful, knowing this — for I had heard my mother say that when we saw that the Bitter Thought was in the White Man we must needs be quiet and most attentive to our gaits.

But this I knew, that it was not the old Jack whom I first knew three years ago — the old lover — Jack under the trees of Master's house.

Presently we came to the ford of the creek and then I saw that the water was high and dangerous. There had been a week of hard rain as I saw, and the creek was all over its banks. And by looking closely could we see where the road crossed the creek, and Jack pulled me up hesitatingly.

"That looks like swimming, to me, Hal," he said, as if talking to himself.

That settled it with me. I had never been in deep water and I feared it, for though I had heard my mother say that all pacers could swim naturally (their stride being lateral as fishes' fins, and not chopped up like the trotters) still I did not wish to test it.

While Jack was debating and I was leaning back afraid, I heard a buggy dashing up in a bold, fine way, and right up to the creek drove Mr. Nettles and Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right. They were on us before we could get away, and in the buggy sat Milly May, with her hair all up in young lady style and a picture hat on and so very grown and handsome. I hardly knew her. She had big bouquets of roses in her arms and a long scroll of paper, which I afterwards learned was her school diploma, and she had finished school and been away to a far land

## How I learned to Swim

all summer, and Mr. Nettles was bringing her back home.

Jack raised his hat and Nettles raised his, but Milly May only glanced at Jack, and I saw the roses leave her face and it grew pale instead.

Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right balked flat floated, as he saw the great sheet of rushing water before him, and the doubtful footing of the ford. He backed his ears and grinned ugly at me, being tired from the long drive and scared to balking at sight of the deep water.

"You big, skin-jerked *hippo-jammer*," he grunted testily at me, "why don't you lead the way and see if it is horse deep and swimming? All you scrub pacers can swim."

*Whack!* And Nettles cut him with the whip: "Go in, sir," he clucked, "it's not swimming!"

"Hold on, sir," said Jack, speaking quickly and very earnestly; "that will swim your horse — I have crossed it too often."

"Oh, well, I am a swimmer myself," said Nettles angrily, and *whack* came his whip on his horse again (cross at Jack's speaking to them), and Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right, losing his head and scared, plunged into the deepest of the water, missing the ford bed entirely.

I heard Milly May scream as Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right went under, gasping for breath and blowing water from his nostrils and crying sillily: "*Help, Hal, for Bok's sake, old man —*" *chug — glu-g — glu-g!* and he went under again.

Up he came, struggling in the whirlpool. For a minute the buggy sat on the water, then it went over with the current and I saw Nettles leap, go under — then come up clutching wildly about and finally grabbing a willow

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limb, hanging low in the water, where he bobbed up and down like a cork, too cowardly to turn loose, and crying to Jack: "*Save the girl! My God, she's drowning!*"

Milly May had been thrown clear off the buggy, now upside down, and half under the water, and had been swept quickly past us in the current.

Once — twice — I saw her go under — and then that frightful nightmare feeling of the witch's ride came over me, and without a word Jack and I acted together, he wheeling quick and closing his heels to my flank.

Like an arrow I darted for the low bank below Milly May, and as Jack's spur struck me I jumped ten feet into the middle of the current.

Under I went — head and all; and as I came up again I struck the long pacing stride of my ancestors and like the despised sidewheelers — as they had nicknamed us — I was cutting the water bearing Jack easily on my back, and headed for the other shore.

We had timed it well, for he caught Milly May as she came up the second time. Leaning low in the saddle he gave me the reins and holding with one hand to the pommel, he had grasped her under her arm, her head and shoulders above the water. She was half delirious and choked, but I heard her say:

*"O Jack, Jack, darling — save me!"*

And Jack said: "Be quiet, don't struggle — you are safe — I have got you!"

It was a struggle for me, though, for the pull of them both sent my head under more than once, and I was never so glad as when my feet struck the bottom, and Jack, swinging out of the saddle, gathered Milly May up in his arms and we all three splashed up the bank together, splashing the water ahead, over the willow leaves and grass.

## How I learned to Swim

"Oh, Jack, how could I treat you so and doubt you?" she cried, and broke down, sobbing, her arms around his neck — right there — while I could see Nettles' head bobbing up and down holding to the willow limb.

As for Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right! I had to laugh — he was hung up in another willow, his forelegs over a limb, the buggy still floating below him, and snorting lustily: "*Help, Hal, or I drown!*"

Jack saw he was tangled up and would drown, and, setting Milly May on the soft grass, he jumped on my back again, and going up stream we plunged in to save the horse.

Again I swam the stream, but it was easy this time — and as we passed Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right I was so mad at having to risk my life to save him who had treated me so ill from the day of my birth, that I whinnied at him in no good humor: "Stop plunging and kicking, you cowardly *hippo-nagger*, or we 'll let you drown!"

He quieted down grunting: "Thank you, Hal — thank you, for I 've treated you like a *Kiotycut* — I don't deserve this — forgive me — but save me, O Greatest of all noble horses — save me!"

I did n't like that flattery in the tail end of his grunt, but I had enough else to think of in keeping my head above water and steering properly in the swift stream. Reaching him, as the water swept me past, Jack grabbed him by the ring in his bit, yanked him free of the tangled limbs, and holding him by the bit, kept his head above water, while I swam easily down the stream till we struck a low sand bar, when we all plunged up and out, the buggy having turned up again and all landed safely.

Hambletonian, wall-eyed and half drowned, blew the water out of his nose and said:

## The Gift of the Grass

*"Ha — Ha — Hal, many thanks! But that was surely first Monday in Huleel!"*

By this time Nettles had found out that the willow limb that he was hanging to was part of the tree, and we all watched him pull up to the tree and from there to another limb toward the other bank, on the side he first started in. From there he struck the ford and waded out, back to the bank, and came out of the water, right where he had started in.

Milly May looked much relieved when she saw him safe, and Jack told him to go down the creek a few hundred yards where he'd find a larger tree that had been cut down across a high place between banks, and he could cross it, he thought.

And Nettles started off through the woods.

"Are you cold, Milly May?" said Jack, coming up and sitting down by her.

"Oh, no — but, Jack, I am as wet as the day I was baptized!"

This startled me and I wondered if Lamplighter did it, but I never was told.

Jack, on the grass by her, seemed to eat her up with his eyes — and never did I see any one so pretty as she was, even though she was wrapped up in a carriage robe and with wet hair shining like grass, dew-spangled with water.

Jack was in earnest and he talked quick and fast while waiting for Mr. Nettles to come. I could hear Milly May say: "Oh, no — no — Jack — Dad would kill you! I would not have him see you here for the world!"

"But when we are married," said Jack, "let him do his worst — I'll take you anyway. I'll go to the end of the earth with you. He has cheated me for two years — now I'll take it in my own hands. As for making you marry

## How I learned to Swim

*him*,” he went on, nodding toward the woods where Nettles had gone — “I’d kill *him* first!”

I was over ears interested in what they were saying, for as I said, the talk of lovers (*hippo-huggers*) always sent funny feelings across my heart; but Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right kept butting in now that he was safe, and talking to me in a condescending way, all his flattery and gratitude now gone. He laid all the blame on the harness tangling him up, and said if let alone he would soon have swum out. “Of course I am indebted to you, Hal,” he said, “for your aid, but I hope you will not presume on account of this to think that I could afford to recognize you in society should we chance to meet. You see, we people of quality must be very circumspect and careful to maintain our proper standing, and though we may speak to mules and nigger horses on the outside as our servants, we would not dare to recognize them in public places.”

He was saying much more of this kind when I told him I cared not whether he spoke to me or not, that I looked upon him and his kind as a curse to the animal world, and I hotly told him that as Bok was just and evened up all things, they would yet see a day of squaring in their lives, even as Gray Lize had met hers.

I was very angry, and having grown large and strong I did not fear him now, and what more I might have said I know not, for I was attracted by Milly May and Jack, for very distinctly I heard them agree that, since things had come to such a pass and since they loved each other more than life itself, there was nothing to do but for Jack to steal her away and marry her, and that he would do one week from to-night.

They talked it over low and whispered, and Milly May with white cheeks and Jack most earnest and determined.

## The Gift of the Grass

In a few words it was planned, and I felt proud and happy to know that I was to be in at the stealing — I was to carry them to the preacher's, whoever he is.

“But Dad —” said Milly May. “Jack, he will kill you — even if we are — married —”

“He shall never catch us,” laughed Jack, “not with Hal there —”

And Mr. Nettles coming up very glum and scowling, they hushed up, and though Milly May was very solicitous about his wetting, and if he found the foot-log all right, I could see her eyes twinkle when she said she supposed it was because he, too, got tangled up in the harness, that he could not swim out and rescue her. Jack said nothing — nor did he even notice Nettles. But fearing lest she might go too far (for he could see how happy she now was, all because they had settled everything between them), he put her in the buggy, Nettles silent, and looking on like a rat fallen into a garbage barrel.

“You are all right now and had better drive on rapidly or she might take cold,” said Jack quietly, after he had them in the buggy.

“Jack;” it was Milly May, her eyelids still wet with water as she leaned over to tell him good-bye.

Jack came closer, his hat off.

“Have you forgiven me, Jack?” and she leaned over and looked so sweetly into his eyes, while Nettles, silent, sat scowling.

“It's all the reward I have for you, Jack,” and the buggy rolled away.

“It is all I wish, Milly May,” called back Jack, his face breaking into daylight again.

“Ha, Hal,” he laughed leaping upon my back — “ha — ha — we are *men*, Hal — and our blood is fetched from fathers of war-proof! Shall we take that flood again?”

## How I learned to Swim

And I took it, for it thrilled me with the danger and the thunder of its roar, and breasting it, my great muscles cooled to the swirling pool and I gloried in it — in my pride and strength.

And a different Jack it was that sent me thundering home in my long, frictionless pace, saying, as he patted my wet, steam-smoked mane: "I 'll steal her to-night week — Hal — Mine! Think of it — Milly May mine!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE PERfidY OF MR. NETTLES

ONLY two days afterwards, Mr. Nettles drove by in a pretty green and red cart, and Kitty was with him, as beautiful as those rare, fair pictures which hang in the rosy morning framed in by the hills, heralding the sunrise, amid the clouds. Hers was not the kind of beauty which Milly May had, but of a far daintier kind; and, withal, of daring.

He was jogging Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right, and I knew he was training him also for the great race. Neither of them even looked at me, and I doubt if Mr. Nettles knew who I was though I helped them out of the water but two days before. Our own little stable was near the Captain's and I saw Miss Lightfoot's head sticking out of the window.

Mr. Nettles stopped and I heard him say: "I 'll bet you five pounds of candy you would n't do it, my little Mint Julip."

Then Kitty in her daring way jumped out of the cart and said: "The little Mint Julip will just take that bet — come, put a bridle on her." I did not know what it was they were talking about until Mr. Nettles, after looking around to see that no one was near, went in and put a bridle on Miss Lightfoot. She came out mad and plunging, for she was ill-tempered and spoiled, and did n't want to do anything except what she liked. In her horse way she said:

## The Perfidy of Mr. Nettles

"It is ridiculous — absurd! you don't know me. *I am Miss Lightfoot, sir! Oh, such infamy!*"

"She has never been ridden by a woman," said Nettles, thoughtfully and noticing how Miss Lightfoot snorted around. "Now look here, Little Julip, I 'll pay the bet if you 'll not try it!"

"Coward — Sissy!" cried Kitty, tossing her pretty head. "Here, take my foot. I 'll tame her — indeed, we know each other better than you think!"

With that she thrust her pretty foot into Nettles's hand, and while he held Miss Lightfoot with one hand Kitty sprang on the filly's bare back, and worst of all she sat sidewise, and how she ever balanced herself I do not know. Miss Lightfoot was mad and went out of the gate in a whirlwind of speed; but Kitty sat her steady and guided her up the long lane, Miss Lightfoot running hard and Kitty sitting her as if the two were one.

Nettles chuckled and chuckled, and I saw the light of great desire and pride come into his eyes; and he looked very satisfied when he saw how she handled her mount. "God, what a girl — it 's worth risking my life for her!"

When Kitty rode back all the ginger was out of Miss Lightfoot. She was limp as a wet swipe-rag and covered with sweat.

"That was a ride worth while," cried Kitty, her eyes shining and her cheeks flushed.

She jumped off of Miss Lightfoot before Nettles could help her. "Put her back now — nobody saw me. And we 'll just drive to the store after that candy, sir."

"Oh, say," said Nettles as he came up to her looking so flushed and pretty, "sit down under this beech-tree on the grass. It is not nearly sundown yet and we 'll have plenty of time to drive to the store and get you back home before night. I have got something to tell you."

## The Gift of the Grass

Kitty glanced at the sun and they sat down on the grass near me. She tossed pebbles into the water, watching them splash, and Nettles lay stretched out below her, for a long time looking passionately at the girl before him.

Finally he said: "Let me see our engagement ring a minute," and he tried to take her hand, but she only drew a ring off her finger and handed it to him, laughing at him. Nettles flushed and pretended to be mad. But she did n't care and threw pebbles into the water, while he sat looking at the ring and thinking.

"It 's a right pretty diamond, Julip" (which seemed to be his pet name for her), he said, "and I want you to do me a favor with it."

She stopped throwing pebbles and looked at him in that serious way she had when her eyes quit laughing.

"You know Milly May has come back from school," he went on, and I could see that he was trying to say it indifferently enough. But to me — who had learned to distinguish the slightest rise or fall on account of the voices of my kind, I could read so much more easily his voice than Kitty could.

"Yes," said Kitty, "but what about her?"

"Well, you see," went on Mr. Nettles, "she and Jack are in love with each other, and her father, my partner, the Squire, hates Jack and all his family like a rattle-snake. He has kept her at school now two years to keep her from seeing Jack, but now that she is back they have fixed it up again, I think."

Kitty's eyes brightened and she laughed.

"Oh, is that so — well, I 'll do all I can to see that they do!"

"Oli, no, you won't," said Nettles quickly and angrily. "No — this is no love foolishness — there 's a feud in the families."

## The Perfidy of Mr. Nettles

Kitty looked at him, quiet and surprised.

"What I want you to do is to help me. I mean help the Squire — for it does n't make any difference with *me*," he said quickly (which was a lie for I so easily read his voice and it said just the opposite); "but you see he is my partner and this is a business thing with me — just to help out my partner — you see, Kitty, my sweet one," he said, looking softly at her and trying to kiss her hand.

Kitty nodded and I could see her looking earnestly at Nettles, and, though she drew back her hand, I saw her face flush, as one who had made up her mind to it without the love that should go with the loving.

And this troubled me for I saw she was playing with Nettles for high stakes.

"In spite of everything," Nettles went on, "it looks as though she will love no one but Jack, though she has not seen him for two years to speak to him. Now we want her to marry another man, for she is just about the finest —"

"Who?" said Kitty looking indifferently enough at him.

"Oh," and Nettles flushed in spite of himself. "Oh, well, that's a secret of the old man's — but I'll tell you in time, Julip. I'll keep nothing from you."

"Now it's this," he said easily and getting closer to her, "when you see Milly May, you just kind of make out that you are in love with Jack and he with you."

"Oh!" said Kitty flushing, "but I can't —"

"My little Julip," said Nettles, trying to kiss her.

But she sprang up and said laughing: "No — no — Sir Prince," which seemed to be her nickname for him; "not till we are married."

"But you'll do this for me — surely — since I love you so and am going to make you my wife, the highest honor any true man can give a woman — you'll help me and

## The Gift of the Grass

my partner out — and — and — ” said Nettles, putting the diamond back on her finger, “ tell her this is your engagement ring — yours and Jack’s.”

“ Oh, I can’t — I can’t,” said Kitty, “ Oh, you don’t love me or you would never ask me to do so false a thing.”

“ Tush,” said Nettles feigning anger, “ this is nonsense. Now here, Kitty, you know what I told you all the time — that as sure as you were true to me and me alone, I ’d make you my wife, Julip — you know I will. I ’ll take you out of this cursed little narrow place, away from these scandal-mongers, away from the people who scorn you falsely, and with my money and brains we ’ll go to a city where you will queen it with the queenliest of them. You don’t love me, little girl.”

“ You know what I said to you,” said Kitty, looking serious and more pretty than ever; “ that I ’d marry you for a home and a name and to be taken away from these people who have cast me out wrongfully and who would drive me to the very ruin they falsely accuse me of. Yes, I will marry you as I told you for that — but not for love — I can never love again,” and she looked, despite herself, across, toward the little schoolhouse in the woods.

“ Oh, this other thing is just a joke — it ’s only a little fun I ’m going to have with Milly May and Jack. I ’ll tell you all about it when it ’s over. I should n’t have fooled you at first about it; and now go ahead and do it and humor my joke.”

But Kitty still hesitated, her eyes troubled and downcast.

Nettles caught her in his arms, and though she struggled he kissed her, calling her pet names.

“ Promise me,” he said holding her and kissing her crimson cheeks, “ just for my sake — just for a joke.”

“ Turn me loose and I ’ll do it,” she said flushing red.

## The Perfidy of Mr. Nettles

He tried to kiss her again, but she sprang away saying:  
"Now you promised me —"

"I 'll smother you with kisses this time next year when you are my wife," he said.

They had been walking toward the cart and she sprang in, taking the lines in her own hands and driving Hambletonian-Junior with a nervy, daring grip.

But O Bok — Bok — how I did wish that I had the tongue of human — that I might tell Jack! Alas, and to be forever dumb!

And Miss Lightfoot was even madder than I.

"That little daughter of the Great Whites," said she to her mother, "is in a fair way to be heart-broken (*nagluloo*). Why, that man is a masher (*pony-poker*) and is playing a double game with her."

"He reminds me of Sir Archibald De Korentz that I ran with in the Cumberland Futurity," said her mother reminiscently. "Oh, what a heart-breaker he was! I was so fond of him. Alas, he broke a tendon trying to keep up in a hot race with that dreadfully common and fast thing, Mad Mary Maria and — and," she sighed, "they had to destroy him!"

"I have no love for that little pretty daughter of the Great Whites," said Miss Lightfoot, "for never did I have such a masterful hand on the bit in my mouth as that pretty slip of a thing held. But with all her beauty she is a wild thing, virile, and of many ways, and that *pony-poker* with all his nerve will find she will turn to fire in his heart should he deceive and scorn her. Oh, why bother? It is their way — the Great Whites — to flatter and deceive and at the nod of their heads to twist the mouths of us and curse our flanks with the spur. And how she did ride me! What a cruel arm she had, with all her beauty! Let him break her heart — let him *nagluloo*

## The Gift of the Grass

her! I care not! Tell me, Mother," she said changing her voice, "about that charming Sir Archibald. It seems to me you had all the fun in *your* days. O, to have been born before these mules were set free, and we had some blooded horses in the land!"

But it weighed greatly upon my mind, and though I told Billy about it he only grunted and said that our minds were not great enough to take in the plans of the Great Whites, and to beware of Nettles, he being my natural born *nagger* from the day of my birth.

But still I worried, for I loved both Reddy and Kitty, and I could not see how Mr. Nettles expected to marry both of the Great Whites' daughters, and I knew that very much he wished to mate with Milly May.

"Bah," said Billy when I said it, "thou art ever to be a fool, Hal. He is but playing with the little poor one — playing for the time and the wild desire of it and to deceive her in the end. He would mate with the other, of the land, of *flukes*, and the horses. As for just how this particular Great Goat of a White will do it — bah — I care not! It is all owing to their foolish and unnatural laws. For that villain is just as much of a Goat as I, the only difference being that he wears clothes and has no beautiful whiskers, as I have, and can talk. He would have him just as many wives but his laws permit him not. Therefore, dog that he is, he hesitates not to play the liar and the deceiver, for the law of nature knows no law of man," he added wisely. "Bah — it is a fool play — the ethics of these Whites and the seeming of things they are not. Now, we Butt Headers," he began —

But I left him. My heart was troubled.

## CHAPTER XXX

### MR. NETTLES PUTS ON THE SCREWS

THE very next night, his own horse being lame, the Captain rode me down to the village store, and there I learned much that explained things. The village store sat where two roads met and was long and narrow, with heavy board shingles and a high front porch with steps going up to it. The front of the store was full of the things needed by the Great White for his barter and trade; but the rear of the store was a place that smelt always of the sickening smell of the corn juice, the same that I had smelt so strongly on the Squire the first day of my birth. They called this place a dram shop, or what we horses call a *muck manger*, and there they played a game for stakes, by them called poker, but by us called *high-hackney*. It seems that this game had gone on, every now and then, in which the Squire, the Captain, and Mr. Nettles had joined, and though there was no game that night there was much drinking on the part of the Squire, though Mr. Nettles drank not, and his coolness and deep plannings were very plain to me. Now and then, near the window where I was hitched, I could hear the Squire and Mr. Nettles in hot argument, for the Squire was in that angry way which comes with a half indulgence.

“You might give me a chance by playing one more game, Nettles,” he said.

“Why, I ‘ve won everything you have got — what you did n’t already owe me,” said Mr. Nettles. “What would

## The Gift of the Grass

you put up against this for a square game to-night," and he pulled out of his inside coat pocket a folded paper of writing.

"What is it?" asked the Squire scowling, and in no good humor at so pointed a question.

Nettles smiled: "I don't really want it, of course I should have had the money. It is n't usual for gentlemen in their games to take mortgages instead of money; but I did it to give you a chance to pay out."

The Squire scowled. "Well, it 's a good mortgage, ain't it? I guess there ain't no better farm and home in this country than mine, and I 'm a man of my word and I made that mortgage in good faith."

"Oh, I know that," said Mr. Nettles quickly, "but it ain't money, and I have got to have the money — I 've waited over a year already. To tell you the truth," he said indifferently, "I am going back to Kentucky after the races at Nashville next month. I promised you I 'd drive there for you."

"Yes," said the Squire suddenly brightening up, "and I 'll win enough to pay you the whole thing. Why, there ain't nothing can beat both of my horses. If the trotting colt don't do it, what can beat that fast pacing horse you bought for me in Kentucky?"

"*Sh-h*," said Mr. Nettles looking around to see that the Captain did n't hear. But the Captain had walked into the storeroom and was talking with the storekeeper.

The Squire grinned. "I like to have forgotten. Say, Nettles," he said punching him jocularly in the side, "say, now, I never will believe that horse, Kentucky Prince, is a green one. He paced our track in fifteen — now you know it takes a mighty good one —"

"Won't you ever hush?" said Nettles testily and whispering it low; "you will give the whole thing away! If

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he is a ringer they 'll never prove it — risk me for that."

The Squire sat up. "But look here, Nettles," he said; "now I 'm a fair man and for a fair deal, and I won't be a party to any shady deals. If the horse has a record we ought to say so and race him in his class."

"Well, take him and race him," said Mr. Nettles angrily, "I 'll have nothing more to do with it."

"Oh, don't get mad about it," said the Squire kindly; "I just meant for us to do the square thing. I can't afford to be expelled and ruined by racing a ringer; I 'd rather lose my home and farm — let you foreclose your mortgage or give you a deed to it and be done with it."

"Well, I 'll tell you now," said Mr. Nettles still angry, "it 'll have to be one or the other. I want my money. I don't seem to be getting much of a deal myself these days. It does n't look as if I were wanted much at your house now."

"Why, what do you mean?" said the Squire looking up. Nettles only whistled softly and said nothing.

"If anybody has been uncivil to you I want to know it," said the Squire. "Has Milly May been in one of her moods since she came back?"

"I should say so," said Nettles angrily, "why she 'll hardly speak to me since that big backwoods lout pulled her out of the creek the other day."

"I wish I 'd been there," said the Squire bringing his fist down on the table. "I 'd a filled him full of lead for techin' my daughter. I 'd ruther seen her drown right there than to marry him — the blood that spilled my brother's blood!"

"Well, if we don't watch she 'll do it," said Nettles wisely. "Of course I won't care — I want her to marry the man of her choice."

## The Gift of the Grass

"That man 'll be you if you let me manage it," said the Squire. "You know I 've allers liked you," he went on. "You 're the only gentleman in these parts and the only man that 's got any real hoss sense. Why, I thought she was beginning to like you fine. I thought —"

"She was," said Nettles, "till that fellow got her in his arms the other —"

The Squire rose up furious. "Sir, don't say that to me! His arms around my daughter! The blood that killed my only brother? Don't stir me up on that subject, Nettles, I 'll go over and call him out and kill him to-night."

Nettles laughed and whispered low. "Now, to be honest, I don't believe in these feuds and all this killing. But if you really want to kill him you can do it by watching your premises for I am sure they have fixed up things and he 'll be slipping over to see her soon. I 've been wanting to tell you about it, but I 've only fixed up some plans of my own to-day," and he glanced around to see that there was nobody in the room, "and if you 'll help me he 'll never see her again."

"Help you," said the Squire, "Nettles, are you drunk? Who 's going to marry her but you?"

"Sh-h," said Nettles, "come here," and they walked out of the back door and sat on the steps. The Squire was so mad I could see his red shining face glowing in the starlight. "Tell me, Nettles, what is it? Why, I 'll kill him as I would a dog."

Then they talked, but so low I could not hear it. But I saw the Squire writhing, he was so mad, and clinching his fist till I thought he 'd curse out loud.

"I 'll lock her up," he said at last in a louder tone. "I 'll make her marry you, Nettles, if that 's the way she is going to repay my love and kindness for her."

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“No,” said Nettles, “don’t do that, don’t even let her know; but you know how he has to come to get to the house.”

“I’ll kill him if I live to see him there,” said the Squire hotly.

“Well, that’s all it’ll take to break it up,” said Nettles coldly, “provided I don’t break it up before.”

Then he told the father of the plans he’d fixed for Kitty to break it up. “She’ll be over to-morrow and we’ll wait and see. That’ll be better; if we can prove he is false to her she’ll despise him — but if we kill him — well, that’ll fix her forever. She’ll never stop loving him.”

“That’s so,” said the Squire nodding.

“So leave it to me,” went on Nettles, “and I’m thinking you’ll see a change in her to-morrow night. She’ll be ready to marry any one when she thinks Jack is engaged to another girl and is false to her. And if that don’t break it, what about —”

He stopped and listened.

The Squire sat up. “What?” he asked.

“We meet them to-night,” said Nettles.

“Oh, the Night Hawks,” said the Squire.

“One of your brothers is among them, you know,” went on Nettles, “and we have only to hint to them that Jack is to be waylaid and shot.”

“I’ll help do it,” said the Squire; “ain’t I one of them?”

“Sh-h,” said Nettles. “We’ll try the girl plan first. Before she learns better — why, well, I’ve always loved her,” he said simply.

“Yes, and you shall have her,” said the father. “You’ve been a good friend to me and stuck to me through thick and thin, and I’ll pay that mortgage, Nettles — don’t you fear — I’ll do it this fall.”

“Oh, don’t mention that,” said Nettles pleasantly.

## The Gift of the Grass

"Come, let 's go in; we can talk as we ride back where the clan meets to-night."

An hour afterwards as the Captain rode me back I heard him say: "And Nettles holds a mortgage on the Squire's farm! Well, that looks bad!"

Very quietly he rode along thinking. The moonbeams fell through the tree-tops across the road. I myself was sleepy, when suddenly there came to my nose the mingled scent of many horses and men. I threw up my head and stopped, giving my rider every indication that he had better go slow, that there was danger ahead. We had reached the thickest of the woods. Near by was one of those rocky places in the forest where only cedars grew and, hearing the sound of many horses coming, the Captain spurred me quickly into the cedars. Just across the road was another cedar grove and as we stood concealed, there came down the road the horses we had heard. They were a motley band, ridden by men of all garbs, but each one had over his face a cloth mask which fell to his shoulders.

"The Night Hawks," said the Captain; "be still, Hal, it is death to us if we are discovered."

They were driving in front of them, his hands bound behind his back and tied to the pommel of two horsemen who rode on each side of him, a negro whom we afterwards learned had burned a barn and with it the horses in it, but a few nights before. Without a word they stopped in the woods near us and soon I saw the body of the negro swinging from a limb while pistol shots sounded in the air.

The Captain, not being one of them, spurred me away and towards home.

"And these are the men who would kill Jack as readily as a dog," I said to myself. And a great fear held me.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### A WAGER OF GOODLY LAND

THE great race was to come off in the great city the next month and very carefully and secretly did Jack and Reddy work me, not for speed (for as Billy said, I had that to burn), but for endurance. And looking back now I wonder that I was not ruined, seeing how little my trainers knew, and how green we all were. I, full-blooded and strong in the might of my great strength, a cuffed and roughened son of nature, with only the mettle of the pasture in my veins, and the aroused instinct of great ancestors in my soul, took the work that would have killed a son of a lesser breed, with the ease of an untamed Centaur. For one day — think of it — Reddy, to test my endurance, drove me five blistering heats, and the last I finished as swift and strong as an unthrottled iron horse that speeds thundering over the rails of steel. And the next morning, after Reddy's rub-down, when I came from the stall, vaulting and leaping, with burning muscles that itched for the strain of the race and the going, Jack looked at me wonderingly and said:

“Reddy, he can pace across the State and not draw a long breath! And that is n't all, but did you see that finish? He has got that rare gift given only to the great — either of men or horses — reserve power — the power of coming a little better — the ability to come yet again when others are all in.”

## The Gift of the Grass

And thus like schoolboy braggarts, did they praise me to my face, and fool that I was, I loved it!

And more and more did I hear of the Great Race, how all the best people and the best horses of the State would be there, how bet after bet had been put up on the favorite, Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right, how the purse was a thousand dollars in gold hung up on the wire for the winner, and what great honor went with the winning.

“I’ll win it, Billy,” I said to him that night, glorying in my five great heats and chewing my bright clean oats which Reddy had pledged his cart and harness for (so close was he in the pinch). Nor did he tell me, as I afterwards learned, that both Kitty and Sky-Eyes, as well as he, went often supperless to bed that I might have the grain.

“Why do you think so?” asked Billy, seriously.

“Why, Jack and Reddy both say so,” I said convincingly.

“Fool that you are,” said Billy, “you little know what you are up against! You have n’t a dog’s chance! Listen, for I have come over to-night to tell you and warn you. Mr. Billy Buck, my old friend, died last month, and I made a call last night on his forty-odd widows. They live at the Squire’s and are charming creatures, and I hope yet to marry the whole bunch by spring. At present, having formally proposed,” he winked, “they want to consider me as a brother and a friend, which is the first step of all virtuous and modest females who would eventually go with you to the meadows green, so I consider that settled,” he said, chewing with gusto his penny-royal. “But while over there I wandered into the stable and heard the horses talking. And there I saw a mean-tempered one of many oaths and much conceit whom

## A Wager of Goodly Land

they call Kentucky Prince. Never saw I so foul a mouth nor heard such braggart oaths from so wicked a heart as from his. Boastingly and shamelessly he admitted that he is a ringer — ”

“What is that,” I asked astonished. “Is it a horse who goes around a ring as do those in a circus?”

“Ah, how much you have to learn, Hal!” said Billy. “A ringer is among horses what a blackleg, a crook, a cheat is among men. His true name is not Kentucky Prince, but the famous race horse Roderick, and under that name his record is nigh the ten mark. Think of it, and yours?”

“Two-twenty-four,” I said proudly; “not a record, but a trial on that half-mile track.”

“Hal,” said Billy solemnly, “he will pace rings around you. I’ll not go to see you beaten and cheated out of your chance by such a fraud. A two-ten racer in a green class? Bah, the ways of these whites! You have n’t a dog’s chance. I am sorry for you.”

“Well,” said I, boastingly and flushing hot, “he may, but when he does he will know that he has been to a horse race!”

“Hal, Hal,” said Billy, “you are indeed wonderful — wonderful for your nerve! Listen now to the scheme of Mr. Nettles. He will drive the Ringer, some one else the trotting colt of the Squire’s. They think the trotting colt can win. If he can they will let him. But if they find he is beaten, Nettles will cut loose that ringer, and what green horse can pace in two-ten? They have it fixed to win anyhow — fair or foul — it ’ll be foul, mark you. And watch Nettles and the Squire bet, and bet on the field — watch now! I have heard enough.”

I stamped my foot in anger. “They shall not rob us that way — Reddy and me — I ’ll — ”

## The Gift of the Grass

"But you are dumb, you can't talk," said Billy.

"I'll race his foul and fraudulent heart out of him," I cried; "I'll beat him or die!"

"Good-bye," said Billy consolingly and satirically; "if that's the case you'll be dead next month. I'll speak now to Lamplighter for funeral services."

"You go to Hulee," I cried, angrily, kicking at him as he ran out of my stall. "You are a Butt-header," I said, "and think you know it all — that all men are corrupt and woman has her price; that life and the world is a bald chance and there is no God of Justice. But mark me," I went on, for the first time in my life angry with Billy — "mark me, you little bundle of wisdom and a bad smell — hear me when I say that there is a God for the Star Pointers, and I'll go into that race with all my faith in my heart and the knowledge that He has never deserted me. I'll do my best and leave it to Him."

"He'll be off hunting or asleep," said Billy; "you'd better leave it to Lamplighter."

For which, if I had got to him, I would have kicked him over the fence.

But almost instantly I saw his reasons verified, for the Captain rode by and stopped to look at me. I saw a gleam of satisfaction in his eye and I heard him chuckle and say:

"That nigger colt — well, well, who'd have expected it? I never saw such muscle, such legs, such power! I'd play my farm on him."

There was a clatter and a noise of a coming vehicle, and Mr. Nettles drove up.

"What is that thing?" he asked the Captain, after exchanging salutes and looking quickly and keenly at me.

"That thing," said the Captain curtly, "is what you once named my sheep-pony."

## A Wager of Goodly Land

Mr. Nettles got out and looked me over, while Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right did not even look at me.

"Why, I thought he was ruined by a barb wire," he said at last, feigning not to see my good points. "He looks as if he were being trained," he added.

"He is," said the Captain, not pleased that Mr. Nettles knew it. "He is going to race in the Cumberland Futurity if he lives, and I'd love to bet that he'd win it."

Mr. Nettles looked at him astonished.

"You don't mean that?" he asked, ever so carelessly, as if trapping the Captain into a statement.

"I'd bet the very ground I stand on that he can," said the Captain, with vigor.

Mr. Nettles laughed and looked around him. "It's goodly looking land," he said carelessly. "I'll be glad to get in on that bet," and he laughed goodnaturedly.

"Well, will land the equal of it do it?" asked the Captain, ever so carelessly himself, but watching Mr. Nettles all the time.

"How much?" asked Mr. Nettles.

"This farm," said the Captain, "is a quarter section of as good land as lies in Tennessee. It belongs to my nephew Jack, but — well, it's mine. If you really have got something, let it be a put-up and not a talk."

Mr. Nettles flushed. "I tell you what," he said, "of course I thought you were joking — you don't even know what's in that race — I'd hate to rob as good a man as you —"

"Oh, don't mention it," said the Captain, biting his mustache. "I've really been looking for a nice gentleman like you to give him this farm, anyway. Put up your land now — I tell you the Hal colt can beat your whole bunch, but since he is a sheep-pony, I ought to have odds."

## The Gift of the Grass

"I 'll give you odds," said Mr. Nettles hotly. "Here," he went on, drawing a paper from his pocket; "here is a mortgage I hold on my partner's farm. It is worth twice this place, but I 'll put it up against a deed to this that your horse does n't win the race."

"Oh, you take the field," said the Captain; "I thought you 'd bet on your own colt there."

"It will take a good one to beat him," said Mr. Nettles, "but he 's the Squire's choice. I 'll drive my own horse. I 'll play the mortgage on the field."

"It 's a wager," said the Captain, so quickly that Mr. Nettles looked at him as at a crazy man. "Meet me tomorrow and the deed goes up against it."

"Do you mean it or are you only joking?" said Mr. Nettles, quickly, with the excitement of a thing easily won.

"Meet me at the store in the morning," said the Captain, "and the deed will be there. The Sheriff of the county — we 'll let him hold them."

"I 'll be there at daylight," laughed Mr. Nettles, "but mark you now, you know I said I did n't want to rob —"

"Oh, I know you don't *want* to," said the Captain, in that funny way again, "but sometimes a man *just has* to!"

As Mr. Nettles drove off I saw him looking carefully across the field to see the lay of it and the extent.

"Well — of all the fools! But it 's a dandy little farm!" He laughed again as if he hardly believed himself.

"These country jays for sense and a sheep-pony for speed! Ha! Ha!"

## CHAPTER XXXII

### KITTY VISITS MILLY MAY

I WATCHED Mr. Nettles and saw him drive down to Kitty's cottage, and soon she came out and I saw them arguing and Kitty hesitating, and finally getting into the cart with Mr. Nettles, but reluctantly.

But as they drove towards me, up the road where my own snug little home was near to the track, Kitty herself pulled the colt to a standstill at sight of me, and said:

"Now, I will not go any farther, for I promised Reddy, who has gone to town, that I would give Hal his oats and water at noon."

"But this is the day you were to see Milly May," said Nettles. "I will drive you over there and back in an hour. Where is our ring?" he said, seeing there was none on her finger.

Kitty's eyes fell. Then very bravely she looked Mr. Nettles in the face, and said:

"You do not intend to marry me — you know it! You love Milly May and you would have me do this false thing to break it up between her and Jack."

"I swear I'll marry you, Kitty," he said; "do you doubt me now when it is so near at hand? It's to save human life and broken hearts I am asking you to do this. Jack is determined to marry Milly May and she him, and if he does the Squire will kill him as sure as he lives. I never saw him so determined and ugly about anything. Now, I think they ought to be permitted to marry," went on Mr. Nettles, smoothly.

Kitty looked at him scornfully.

## The Gift of the Grass

"You don't act as if you thought so, nor will I do this false thing."

"Then I 'll never marry you," said Mr. Nettles, firmly. Kitty stepped quickly from the cart.

"You *will* marry me," she cried, so fiercely that small, hot tears stood in her eyes; "you *will* marry me. Not that I love you — conceited as you are to believe it — but because — because —" she said, "I need your name and a marriage certificate that I may win my way in the world that is respectable, for I am going to be a great singer, who will yet come back here in her private car and prove how falsely cruel her own people have been to her."

Nettles looked at her for a moment in wonder, then broke out into a laugh.

"Well, well, little Julip. You are certainly a tartar, but I 'll settle with you later, *when we are married*," he said, sarcastically. "Now, will you or will you not do as I said and break up that?"

"I 'll break up nothing but your false schemes —"

"There is nothing then for us to do but to break it up ourselves. The Squire will lock her up — he 'll send her away," he said, cutting his horse a sharp blow with the whip and driving fast away. "Good-bye, Madame Nettles," he called back; "I will see you later."

I did not understand what Kitty meant until she came into my stall, and putting her arms around me, sobbed in a way the better Kitty always did.

"Oh, Hal, Hal, life has been cruel to me! I, begging so for a chance that I 'd sell my love for it. And now —"

She pulled out a note from her bosom, which she read softly to herself. It was from the Teacher, begging her to come to him to the great city and be his — for he loved her.

## Kitty visits Milly May

"Not till I can come as his equal — not till I can bring him a good name, and" — she laughed hysterically — "fame, fame; Hal, the same that is to be yours," she said, fondling softly my nose.

"And that may never be for me, oh, Love," she cried, kissing the note.

"Lock her up — send her away?" she said, suddenly remembering. "I guess it is time for us to ride to Jack's," she said, as she slipped the bridle over my head.

It was a dashing ride that Kitty gave me to Jack's, and very earnestly did they talk together under the trees. I know not what they said, but from her earnest, set face, I knew that Jack told her all, and that Nettles would marry Milly May by fair means or foul, and Jack wrote Milly May a note which Kitty, mounting me and with drawn lips and a hot, flushed face, full of hot anger, rode away to deliver.

It was Mr. Nettles and not Milly May who met us at the Squire's gate. He smiled pleasantly as he helped Kitty to alight.

"I thought you would come to your good sense, my little Julip," he said, pressing her hand.

Kitty laughed her quick laugh and tossed her head.

"How are you to arrange for me to see her?" she asked.

"Come this way," said Mr. Nettles, leading the way to a rustic seat under the low boughs of a large oak. "You are doing her and Jack a favor. When I came back the Squire had already decided to lock her up, because his suspicions have been aroused from the defiant way she talked to him, and from what she said he thinks that she is going to run away with Jack. If he attempts it, nothing can save him from death, and Milly May from a broken heart, so you see the good you 'll be doing by breaking this up. You know how to do it, and we 'll

## The Gift of the Grass

see that she never sees him again for an explanation. Oh, my little Julip, I knew I could depend on you — you 'll be Madame Nettles yet," and he laughed.

"But I must go," he said, speaking low, "for I do not want her to think I even know you. I 'll come to see you to-night, my little Julip, after this thing is settled. Then I will do all that you say, provided you go with me."

"Where and how?" asked Kitty, her eyes opening.

"Why, as others do — go with me around the race circuit as Madame Nettles," and he winked, smiling at her. "Think of the fun we 'll have — the horse races, the champagne suppers, the fine gowns for you, the fine hotels we will live in, the fine lady you will be — far away from this meddlesome, gossipy place —"

"You will marry me before I go?" asked Kitty quietly.

"Oh, it will be as good as a marriage —" began Mr. Nettles.

Kitty flushed and her eyes flashed.

"Why is it," she cried passionately, "that from the very first you have tried to ruin me? — have ruined me save only in the eyes of God and myself. Have I done anything to you that you should follow me thus, the Nemesis of my poor little half-starved life, the evil eye that turns all of mine it looks upon to evil? I cannot escape you, our ways are not of our own choosing, our fate is not in our own hands, our little lives were loaned us only for the time being. I cannot escape you, I cannot escape you," she murmured, softly, and with a pathos that moved even me, dumb as I was. "Then, for God's sake, for your own sister's and mother's sake, oh, deal justly with me! Give me the one chance I crave — the chance to be a woman and not a poor, common, painted counterfeit of her that walks the earth in her likeness, but moulded of baser metal! And don't think you deceive me

## Kitty visits Milly May

any longer. I have learned to-day whom you intend to marry — ”

“What do you mean?” cried Nettles, alarmed.

Like the shifting of the mocking-bird’s note did Kitty quickly change. Gone were her fears, her pitiful appeals, her tears even, for she saw suspicion in Nettles’ face and the ruin of her plans. Into a saucy, beautiful laugh she broke.

“You have learned to-day whom I intend to marry — who?” he asked, excitedly and pale.

“I,” said Kitty, “was teasing you.”

He kissed her quickly under the trees.

“Little Julip, you are a tease! But go in now and fix that thing about Jack. Go, and I’ll do the fair thing by you. Trust me, little Julip.”

It was an hour before Kitty came out and Milly May with her, and two more beautiful creatures I had never seen. And I saw there was an understanding between them and plans for the night. For Milly May’s face was pale with the joy of it, and the note from Jack she carried in her bosom.

“I can never forget what you have done for me — for us — to-day,” she said to Kitty as she bade her good-bye. “Tell him,” she whispered, “I shall be there at the oak in the meadow, at midnight to-night.”

Her voice, though trembling, rang with a happy thrill. “And you, I shall never forget you — good-bye, there, I must not be seen kissing you, for they would suspect — ”

She turned quickly to slip into the house, for she saw Mr. Nettles coming up the path. And in turning, I saw the note fall in the grass at her feet as Kitty and I swept through the woods down the shaded path.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### IN THE HANDS OF THE NIGHT HAWKS

I WAS not surprised when, that night, an hour before midnight, Jack came to my stall, his face shining like the full moon which had risen above the blurred slope of the hills. For very carefully had he put me away at set of sun, Reddy being away, and bountifully had he given me the clean bright oats, saying as he patted my neck, "You will have need, perhaps, of all your speed and strength to-night, Hal, for we will take her from that house, or die!"

Bright and happy was his face, I said, as the full moon that grew smaller as it left the rim of the great hills, for he had been to town and in his pocket was his law's permit to wed with Milly May. Kitty alone knew his journey's path, and it was she who stood at the gate and, with a bright smile and nod, said: "Happiness and best of luck for you and Milly May!"

Jack drew rein by her, and I stood biting my bit in nervousness and pawing the earth to go, now that the wild fire of youth and love's romance lay heavy on my own shoulders. For was it not I who would carry them both through the night and the deep woods to the parson's? And might not I be called upon to show the whole bluffing stable of them my heels, should they dare to follow? Never in my veins burned more fiercely the desire to go.

Jack whispered low to Kitty, telling his plans, and with a message to Reddy, that if all went well, to the great

## In the Hands of the Night Hawks

city he intended to go on his honeymoon, and there, two weeks to come, he would meet him at the great race that was to test the mettle of our ancestry.

"From the parson's home, when we are married," he said, "I will turn Hal loose and head him toward home, for I have a horse and buggy to take us to the station in the nearest town. The colt will come straight home," he said, patting kindly my neck, "and should be there by one of the clock. If he is not here by two, you will guess that something has happened to us, Kitty," he said, quietly, "for to-night my life I take in my hands, and so if he comes not by two, go to the Captain and tell him — tell him all, and that, owing to my great secret and not wishing to trouble him, I had withheld it from all save you alone."

"God speed and good luck to you," cried Kitty. "I will wait and watch for Hal, for I know not which Reddy would grieve most to find missing to-morrow when he comes home."

And so, waving her hand, and with bright eyes shining for our happiness, I struck swiftly away down the moonlighted road.

Jack hummed softly a love tune as he rode along, and I, full of fire and the glory of going, strode swiftly forward, expecting in one short hour to have Milly May also on my back and in a swift stride for the parson's. But alas for our plans — alas for the note Milly May so carelessly failed to put in her bosom!

For suddenly, in only a mile of the great oak in the meadow, we were set upon by four men bearing white masks upon their faces, who sprang from behind trees on both sides of us at once, seizing me firmly by the bit, and one on each side of Jack, seizing his hands and bearing down and pinioning his arms to his side. In vain I strug-

## The Gift of the Grass

gled, rearing and trying to break away. And though the men spoke not, I smelt that the smallest of the four was Mr. Nettles. One glance at their white-made faces and feathered plume of the great marsh-hawk in their caps told me they were a band of the dreaded and cruel Night Hawks. Scant mercy I knew Jack would have in their hands, for only a week before, the county had been stirred by their cruel murder of a county judge, called to his door and shot because he had tried to indict their leaders in his court for lynching a negro.

Only the tallest of them spoke, and though Jack knew not his voice, I did, for he lived in another county, and was the Squire's brother, and the brother to him whom Jack's father had slain in the street fight.

"You need n't try to go no farther," he said gruffly, "for the gal is already locked up and would not be able to meet you at the oak if you got there. Your father killed my brother, and this is where I've come miles to settle a feud. It's a life for a life."

Jack spoke not a word, but his face blanched white, and with his hands tied behind him and his legs tied underneath my belly, they turned me around, and mounting horses which were hid in the woods, between us, they struck out through the moon-flecked forest. In the deep woods they stopped by a small stream and they tied me to a swinging limb and tied Jack, his hands behind him, and gagged as he was, at first to a tree, and then they went off, the four of them, to talk. As they talked, the Squire's brother produced a rope, and I could see that he was so intensely cruel and bitter that he was for hanging Jack there, but the smaller man said that it would not do, but that if Jack were shot in the head by his own pistol, which had been taken from him, and then laid on the ground in a natural way, when found it would be a plain

## In the Hands of the Night Hawks

case of suicide because of failure to wed with Milly May. They took pains to speak so that Jack could hear what they said, and that they meant it no one who heard them or knew the cruel record of the Night Hawks could doubt.

After much whispering two of them left, one of whom was Mr. Nettles, but so disguised that even I would not have known had not my keen sense of smell told me plainer than my eyes, and the two rode back through the woods toward the home of the Squire.

But there was left the Fierce One, brother to the Squire, to do the murdering, and another whom I did not know. I expected to see him kill Jack at once, but I knew not the real scheme of these men. I could tell by the moon that the hour of midnight had passed, and so full of anger and fierceness was my heart that I pawed great holes in the ground where I was tied. But for leaving Jack, I had broken my strong bridle rein and gone home in terror and flight. Another full hour they waited, which seemed a month to me, smoking their pipes and drinking vast mouthfuls of white corn-juice from bottles in their pockets. And when one tried to walk, he reeled, but fiercely and cruelly he walked up to Jack.

"You have heard what we are going to do," he said; "suicide you," and he laughed. "Yes, that is a fine plan! To-morrow they will find you in these woods with your own pistol by your side and one bullet in your head — dead — your horse hitched nigh — and the inference will be clear — you tried to steal the Squire's daughter and failed. For she has decided to marry another to-night — for reasons of her own which maybe she can't help," he laughed. "Anyway there 'll be cause enough for you to suicide when it 's all known. Now, you 've one hour to live, and if you 've got any prayers to say, now is a good time to send up your petition to the throne of Grace, as

## The Gift of the Grass

the preachers say," and he laughed derisively. With that he reeled drunkenly towards the other, who was so drunk he could not arise at all, and together they sat looking at the moon and their watches waiting for the hour to pass.

Never saw I so much drunken cruelty manifested in the language and actions of the Great White. Naturally cruel, the stuff they had drunk had taken away what little qualms of conscience they might have felt at doing so desperate a deed. But such I knew was ever the effect of the corn-juice on the hearts of the cruel and murderous.

As they talked they nodded, and each drunkenly promising the other to awake him in an hour, soon both were asleep. I saw Jack tugging at the rope till the great veins stood on his brow. Softly I neighed to him my neigh of encouragement; softly, for fear I'd waken the sleeping men. It was in vain. Too securely was he tied. I saw the look of despair come over his face, and almost I had decided to break my bit in one mighty plunge and stamp the life out of the sleeping demons on the ground as my mother did the sheep-killing dog, when I quivered to tense silence in the faint odor that came to me through the woods. It was so far away that for a moment I stood, my nostrils wide open for the faintest smell, my head up, my ears and eyes strained toward the odor that came fully a mile away. Then came a breeze, and on it, as clear as the type of print, it read: *Shep — Kitty — Villette!*

The first I saw was Shep slipping towards us through the woods with all his caution and courage. Then the hot foam-caked smell of Villette, that strong smell of the horse that has raced with death for a life, came pungent on the breeze. And now I could see them a hundred yards away, and Kitty had slid from Villette's back, and following Shep, who guided her on the trail, she slipped

## In the Hands of the Night Hawks

from her mount and up from tree to tree, very cautiously peering her way to where Jack was bound.

I neighed to them softly to let them know I knew, and Villette answered it, and there was pride of a fine and swift race even in her neigh. It took Kitty but a moment to take in the scene, then with a quick glide she rushed to Jack's tree, and with a stroke of her knife the cords which bound him were cut.

In an instant Jack was at the side of the sleeping men, and with their pistols in his own hands, he tied their legs by the same rope they tied him, and then giving each a kick in the ribs, he said sternly:

"Wake up, you curs — it's my turn now!"

They awoke and tried to rise, only to find their feet tied, and to look into the barrels of two pistols, while behind them stood Shep, ready to jump at their throats and growling, *Let everybody behave!* And as they lay helpless, Jack bound them back to back and so let them lie, cursing and helpless.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE COURAGE OF KITTY

THERE was no time to lose, and swinging Kitty into the saddle, Jack vaulted on my back and through the woods Villette and I rushed towards the home of the Squire. We spurned the soft mould of the wooded road in our flying eagerness to go, whirling the dried leaves before us in flocks, like brown birds. And Villette played like a school-girl in a romp; Kitty, her hair tousled by the night wind, looking more beautiful than I had ever seen her, sitting the filly like the born rider she was, and bending to the stride.

"That was a great ride you made," I said to Villette.

"Oh, little Brother," she laughed as we rushed forward, "it is sweet for us to do our best for those who love us and treat us kindly. How different is Jack from Mr. Dick! And this sweet thing on me, she knows how to ride to my stride, balancing for the least weight and resistance. I could run across the county with such a touch on my rein and such a sweet, lithe weight on my back. 'T is fun, little Brother, fun! We Hals — ho-ho, are n't we the stuff for nerve and a close pinch?" And she bit at me playfully, her graceful head straightened to the stride.

"Don't brag too soon," I said, "for I am thinking our breed and bottom will be tested this night."

"Let it come, little Brother," she laughed. "Those who follow us, those cruel masters on horses of whip and spur, will find that love travels freer and farther than fear, and steeds of kindness outrun steeds of hate."

## The Courage of Kitty

A mile from the house Jack detoured us through the woods, and dropping to a walk we approached it from the rear, and very quietly. In the shadow of the orchard trees they dismounted, and then Jack and Kitty planned for the rescue of Milly May.

"She is in that room," said Kitty, pointing to the upper room that jutted out above. "Look! its rear window opens over the kitchen roof below; now if we only had a short ladder to the kitchen roof. *Sh-h!*"

There was the sound of one walking on the gravel walk in front, and looking we saw two men standing guard at the front gate, with guns in their hands. A whinny from either of us, a bark from Shep, a noise made by Kitty or Jack, and the Squire, who boldly walked the gravel path in front, would have shot us as he would dogs.

And not only that, but through the great window of Milly May's room we could see that another, an old aunt of Milly May's, was in the room with her to guard her.

"We cannot get her out," said Jack sadly; "we will have to give it up. Her aunt is with her. They will take her away to-morrow — they will force her to marry Nettles by lies and threats."

"Wait," said Kitty, slipping forward under the trees. In a short while she was back. "There is a suite of rooms where she is locked up. I was in there only yesterday. There is a ladder under the apple tree. Place it against the kitchen roof and I will slip up and tap on the window of the smaller room. If I succeed — now listen, Jack — if I do, I'll go in and take Milly May's place — get into her gown and she in mine — to slip out to you."

Jack grasped her hand. "But if they see you, Kitty, if they find you there —"

"Listen," she cried, her eyes shining. "If I can get

## The Gift of the Grass

Milly May into the little room I 'll have her tell her aunt she is going to retire, and she will retire," smiled Kitty, "and leave me there to answer for her should her aunt look in or call. And now, good-bye Jack, and God bless you both."

"I can never forget you, Kitty, nor your bravery and kindness," he said.

"And if I see you not again," she said, "nor Reddy, Jack, will you tell him that I love him ever?"

"What do you mean, Kitty?"

"Ay, I mean more than I now can say; good-bye —" and with her finger on her lips waving him not to speak, she slipped with him to the tree where lay the ladder. Soon I saw the ladder go up against the roof, and then the lithe figure of Kitty went up. At the window she stooped; it was half open. She turned and looked back at us, a smile of beauty and triumph on her face, her great eyes bright in the moonlight. One, two, three kisses she threw to Jack, to me, to Villette, and like a slim thing of the woods she slipped into the room.

But that smile of triumph on her face, the glory of her great eyes, her beautiful head thrown up and her great coils of hair tossed back stand silhouetted in my memory even now — the last time I ever saw the Kitty of the cabin, our Kitty, buffeted by what they call Fate, condemned and cast out without trial.

We waited breathless for nearly an hour, Jack nervously standing near me, gripping his pistol's butt, and watching the figures on guard as they stood or sat around the front of the house.

Once, the Squire, wanting water, came to the rear, his gun on his shoulder. I saw Jack start, rise quickly, then grasped my rein as if ready to mount, and I heard him say: "*The ladder — great God, he will see it!*"

## The Courage of Kitty

But the Squire in his anger walked by it, and I heard him talking in his way to himself, saying: "She shall marry him — the vixen — she shall marry Nettles or never leave this room! To lie to and deceive me as she has — to mate and mix my blood with the blood of my brother's murderer."

And I smelt the breath that came from him in his anger — and it was the same breath pungent with the same odor that made him forget all the love of human kindness in trying to kill a helpless colt on the day it was foaled.

After drinking he looked around quickly, for Villette thoughtlessly had stamped her foot and he heard it. I heard him cock his gun and saw him start towards the woods where we were concealed. Then it was that Jack blanched white and grasped again his pistol, saying: "*Great God, will I have to kill him at last?*"

Tell me not that a dog cannot reason, for it was Shep and his quick action that saved us. From our side he darted out, and I thought he was going to attack the half-drunk man. But it was only to attract his attention, for Shep, taking his life in his mouth, darted past him and into the woods beyond.

"A prowling dog," said the Squire, trying awkwardly to raise his gun to shoot Shep, but too unsteady to shoot before Shep had cleared the yard, made a *détour*, and come back wagging his tail for the pat Jack had for him.

The Squire, satisfied, turned and went back to the front of the house.

It was ten minutes more before I saw Jack's face flush, turn pale and then pink, for Kitty came to the window and slipped out and across the roof to the ladder. Jack glided to the ladder and went half way up. I saw him take her in his arms:

"My darling," he said, kissing her again and again.

## The Gift of the Grass

"Oh, Jack!" I heard softly, and then my own heart thumped with excitement, for it was Milly May in Kitty's hat and gown!

She was weeping quietly, from great joy and excitement, and so limp she could not walk, so Jack, holding her in his arms himself, brought her and placed her on Villette. She was trembling and laughing and crying by turns, and when, as Jack mounted, and, holding the rein of Villette in his own hand to lead us quietly through the woods, she turned, and as she looked back for the last time as a maid at the sweet home that had been hers all her life, but which now as she knew too well belonged to Mr. Nettles since she would not marry him, she sobbed so that Jack had to ride up by her side and soothe her, his arms around her. And I heard:

"Oh, Jack, are you right sure you will never regret this; that I will not — that you will love me always?"

And Jack kissed her again and again, swearing so lustily, like a lover, of his undying love, that Villette giggled, and I had to turn away to keep from laughing. Only Shep took it seriously and kept growling: "*Let every married man bee-have!*"

We did not draw a long breath till we had got out of the woods and safe into the big road where we had a clear cut for safety.

"Now," said Jack, giving Villette's reins back to Milly May, "let them come and we'll show them the heels of the Hals," and at his word Villette broke into a swift canter, but I took the swifter pace of my nature and struck the long pace of my mother. Towards the Parson's we flew, the cool morning air whirling Milly May's brown hair in little fluffles of rosy-streaked gold, rivalling those in the mackerel clouds of the West, now tinged with the rising sun.

## The Courage of Kitty

Not a word except the rhythmic stride of Villette's beautifully balanced canter, as she proudly bore Milly May to safety and love, and the long, swinging stride of my own gait, as I reeled off miles at the pace.

"We are too late, darling," said Jack leaning to her in the saddle, "to get to the village in time to catch the train, but I 've another plan that will do; anything will do for lovers, won't it?"

And Milly May, blushing, laughed back at him with her eyes.

"But I 'm afraid for Kitty," she said. "They 'll find her sure before ten, for Aunt will go into her room. Oh, I 'm afraid Dad will kill her, and then, Jack dear; won't they start after us?"

"Let them," said Jack, "we 'll be married by then and if they can catch us on *these*," and he reached over and patted me, "well, they may hang us to the next tree. Trust me, darling, and follow me."

"Not *follow* you, Jack," she said, quickly and sweetly, "but *go* with you, always by your side — as I shall soon promise as a wife to do."

Two miles farther we rode up to the little gate where, amid the big trees sat the humble cottage of the good old Parson. And great was the consternation of the early chickens and geese and the barking of the Parson's house dog as we clattered up to the front porch. With a bound Jack was down and had swung Kitty to the front porch. Knocking loudly, we heard them coming, for the good old couple, the Parson and his wife, were already up and bestir at daylight, as was their custom.

What a kind, intelligent face he had, and silver hair, and calm, quiet manners, all so different from the narrow Long Mane One of the church that abused Kitty! And the gracious old wife, smiling and kissing, like a mother,

## The Gift of the Grass

Milly May, who at the touch of her motherly lips, having no mother herself, fell to sobbing and laughing in the good old lady's arms.

In the little room the Parson married them, and as his round, low, music-carrying voice read the beautiful ceremony that gave them to each other, a mocking bird sang low and sweet in a near by tree a little song that ran like a golden thread of love and life through the sacred promises of the lovers.

And then very graciously did he kiss the bride, saying:  
"God's blessing on you, my children."

And Milly May, as the good wife kissed her, sobbed again on her shoulder saying:

"O mother, if you were only here to see your child's happiness!"

But seeing with my nose so far ahead I neighed quickly, and Jack came out saying: "Something is wrong — see how the colt behaves! Come, Milly, I think I hear the hoofs of pursuing horses."

It was too true. I now both heard and smelt them.

## CHAPTER XXXV

### A TEST OF GRIT AND SPEED

As I said, I had smelt them long before I heard them, for the wind was blowing right and the Daily Current brought me the news as plain as if writ in the headlines of man's paper. And those headlines spelled to my nose: *The Squire, Mr. Nettles, and two Night Hawks. They are armed, desperate, and cruelly determined!*

I sniffed again to catch the scent of the horses, and easily made out Hambletonian-Junior.

“Ho — ho — that big duffer?” I said to Villette; “and they expect him to catch a Hal!”

The next instant Villette braced herself, for Jack swung Milly May into the saddle, the good Parson standing by, calm though pale, and the sweet-faced wife wringing her hands and crying, “Oh, do run, my children, run!”

“Throw them off, Parson,” said Jack wheeling me quickly to the main road.

“Ay, ay, to the limits of my cloth, God bless you, my children, I will,” cried the old man, as he ran ahead of us opening the gate out of which we swept, Jack holding in his arm Milly May’s bridle, while she clung with both hands to the two supports of her saddle, and Villette, laughing, free and jolly in the chance for a run, hugging my side like the game running mate she was.

At the same instant we heard a shout and a cry to halt. It came from the foremost one of the Night Hawks, who, a better rider and better mounted than the Squire, had rushed down a side lane and was heading to cut us off.

## The Gift of the Grass

"Stop, or I'll kill you," he cried to Jack, pointing his pistol at him as he rode at full speed to cut us off. Jack's answer was to draw his own Colts and put both spurs to me.

There was a shot to our left, and almost in our faces as we dashed by him. I saw Jack dodge. I heard Milly May: "O Jack, are you hit?" and then Jack rose up in the stirrups and his great pistol spoke twice, so quickly it sounded as one.

The horse stopped so quickly the man pitched from the saddle almost under our feet, his right arm shattered at the shoulder.

"I ought to have killed him," said Jack, very low but with hard-set lips; "but — but — well, he'll ride no more to-day."

The next instant, in a burst of speed and flying dust, we had left all behind, and were running like a mad team, over the hill a mile away.

At the top Jack drew us to a canter, then to a walk. Milly May, pale, but with flashing, indignant eyes, again said: "Tell me, Jack, were you struck?" Jack laughed, and pulling off his hat showed the bullet hole through the crown.

"You are not a widow yet, sweetheart," he said laughing lightly, and looking from our hill-top a mile down the valley, where we could see the old Parson was standing in the road, trying to stop the other three of them.

But paying no attention to him they came galloping on to the wounded man, who led his horse, which I could see by the way it was throwing its head up and down, had been creased in the neck by Jack's bullet. But the man looked faint and ready to drop.

"I hated to cease the horse," said Jack, "remembering how faithful our own are," and he patted Villette on

## A Test of Grit and Speed

her steaming neck, "but it is the only thing they 've got that can ride with us, for that mare is also a Hal and a half thoroughbred. The coward who shot me I could have killed, but — well, I 'm too happy for murder to-day," and he kissed his wife for the first time.

"Come," he said, "two of them have started again," and once more we swung off and left them.

We ran steadily for five miles headed straight to the eastern foothills of the mountains, and never before had I been so thoroughly put to the test. Only once had I caught a sniff of the pursuers and that was when we stopped for breath some three miles from the Parson's on a high hill and looked back. And then even Milly May had to laugh, for the terrible trotting gait (so different from our saddle gaits) of Hambletonian-Junior had jolted and chafed the old fat, soft Squire so that he had dismounted, and being unable to sit down, Mr. Nettles was pouring cold water on his face and neck from a near by spring. Their horses stood nigh, sweat covered and caked, their heads down, and great gasps for breath shaking their gaunt sides. Seeing us, a mile away, silhouetted on the sky line and the very peak of the highest foothill that leads to the Cumberland Mountains, the old Squire could be seen shaking lustily his clenched fist at us, to which Milly May, now laughing and crimson, answered by throwing him kiss after kiss and saying: "Good-bye, Dad, go on back home and behave!"

This reminded Shep, and he growled at them derisively: "*Let all fools behave!*"

"We 'll take no chances," said Jack, as we started briskly off down the wooded slope of the long hill. "The Squire cannot ride, but the others will follow us through the State. We cannot take the train for we have left that behind and no other will leave till to-night. Besides,

## The Gift of the Grass

they are sure to think the town and the railroad station is our destination, and they 'll ride there before dark to intercept us. There is only one thing we can do, if you will agree to it."

"I 'll go anywhere, Jack — oh, I will agree to anything. They would kill you if they caught us," said **Milly May**.

Jack laughed. "God looks after fools and lovers," he said, kissing her again. "I know a spot where no living man can find us, for no man, save I alone, knows where it is. And we will spend our honeymoon in a more beautiful palace than was ever lived in by the bride of a king. You shall spend your honeymoon in the enchanted Land of Aladdin."

**Milly May** clapped her hands: "Oh, Jack!"

"It is a day's ride, a hundred good miles in a valley near the little town of Monteagle in the mountains. But what is a hundred miles for these?" he said, tapping me lightly with his hand.

"Tell me about it, Jack," said **Milly May**.

"No, you shall see for yourself before night. I am not poet enough to describe it; you shall do it yourself."

"You don't love me, Jack," pouted **Milly May** feigning anger. "Not a Poet? The Great Bard—was it not he who said, the poet, the lunatic and the lover, all were the same?"

Jack kissed her and laughed: "Your lover, dear, yes, always. But they 'll see we are not lunatics for we will vanish as completely from the sight of man before night as if the earth had swallowed us. But come, here is where we part with our pursuers," and he stopped at the swift clear mountain stream which ran across the road. Then we drank of its cool water, and Jack, taking **Milly May's** rein again on his arm, spurred us into it, and instead of crossing and following the main road of the mountain,

## A Test of Grit and Speed

which led to the town and the railroad station, we walked down the bed of the stream for nearly a mile, thus eliminating our tracks completely, and then coming to a trail, we struck into it and turned our heads towards the great mountains miles and miles away.

“Now, Hal,” he said tapping me on the shoulder, “get down to business, and that steady fox trot, both of you. For it’s a long ride before us.”

And so through the woods, following only the trail of the mountaineer, we reeled off the miles, eight to the hour, up and down and winding in and out, following the wooded trail.

Again and again, knowing we were now safe, we stopped to look at the beauty of it all. Once Jack stopped under huge chestnuts, on a great bluff, and pointed to the slope of a mountain side, and never beheld I so gorgeous a scene. The lower side was one great sheet of gold, where maple-trees rose in yellow glory, purpling to the bite of frost; and above, there were intermingled the deep red of gums and the crimson glory of sumac, all topped and blended with the great flushes of the poplar’s old gold and crimson. Above all the great wall of the mountains hung draped in mighty wreaths in festoons of lichens and mosses and spidery spun leaves of the maiden hair ferns, up — up, until the crimson gold and green of the frosted foliage beneath, mingled with the purpling blue of the sky above, all seeming to blend in one beautiful rainbow, which, starting at Milly May’s foot, carried her in a halo of romance on its rings of seven colors into the glory of a lover’s sky.

At noon Jack halted far up in the mountains by a beautiful spring that came from a great rent in the rocks. Soft, dead leaves lay all around, and hickories, then crimson to blackness, stood in a brotherhood. He lifted Milly May from the saddle, stripping us of the hot saddles,

## The Gift of the Grass

bathed our limbs in the cool spring and stood us ankle deep in the pool.

Then with Shep to guard us, he took off his coat, and with his pistol to show that he was a hunter, he went through the woods a mile away to a little mountain store.

In an hour he was back with a sack of fresh mountain loaves of whitest flour and a side of clear, fat and lean streaked, well-cured bacon.

“Bacon and bread — is not this a jolly bridal dinner?” he laughed, as he builded a little fire.

“But we have each other, Jack,” said Milly May; “and oh, I’m so hungry! hungry!”

And then the silly things went to kissing again instead of eating.

But he did not forget us, bringing us the sweet corn stalks, cut in the row with the half ripened ear on them. And I could see from the way that he rubbed me down and kept my feet and ankles in the cool spring, that he was not unmindful of the great race which was so soon to come off.

“This will be only a work-out for you, Hal,” he said patting me, “and this hundred-mile test of mountain climbing, this great journey of a day — well, if it should be over five heats you will be able to go them.”

We rested an hour, Villette and I, nodding, and not appearing to see the spooning of the lovers, what we horses call *lululipping* as Jack rested, his head in Milly May’s lap, smoking and looking up into her eyes and talking of stars which neither Villette nor I could see, it being a clear day and the sun shining.

Again we struck out, and this time higher up still. Ay, and it was a ride, those next six hours! Never had I my grit so tested. Sturdy and true we stuck to it, reeling off the miles, and always as I fagged at the steep climb, my

## A Test of Grit and Speed

cramped and pinched muscles quivering, I could hear Villette behind me in the trail jollying me for a quitter (though she said it in fun, I liked it not) and following me lightly, saying:

“Go on — Little Brother — on! It is sweet to work for those we love!”

And on — on we went. We must make our stopping place before night. With my head down I bucked the steep trail like a bulldog, reeling off the miles past trees I no longer saw, bluffs which were naught to me, past woods of crimson and gold which, in my gentler moods, would have been beautiful to behold, but now, battling the trail with strong muscles and hot flanks and the steady stride of my fox trot, I saw them not.

And behind me came Villette ever ready to guy me jollily, and Milly May clinging, pale and exhausted, but gamely smiling when Jack would kiss her and say:

“Be brave yet a while, darling, we are nearly there.”

“I am following you, Jack, as I promised,” she said.

It was then occurred that test of grit and speed to which Jack, patting us that night, said he owed us his life and Milly May as his bride. For it seems that two of the Night Hawks had some way got on to our trail and had followed us with the silent scent of hounds. And scarcely had Milly May spoken, before we heard them shout as they came with blown horses down the hill. Now we had been going all day, though not riding so fast as they, but never in my heart surged the blood so hot, for we sprang away like a team, Villette and I, and though we had been tired, now that a race for life and death was on, we forgot it all. White-faced, but with lips shut, Milly May sat motionless as Villette fairly flew by my side. Up — up a long slope we went and never felt I so full of the glory of going. We heard them shouting be-

## The Gift of the Grass

hind us — we glanced back to see their blown horses, half way up, one staggering and panting as if every breath was his last, the other reeling and falling dead in his tracks.

Jack looked and laughed a cynical laugh, checking us gently as he did, for already we were far out of their reach.

“One dead and the other wind-broken, ruined! If they follow us further, sweetheart,” he said, stooping and kissing Milly May for reassurance, “if they follow us farther it will be afoot!”

And springing off he unbuckled our girth for a moment, speaking love words to us all the time, and proud words which made us prouder, though our sides fluttered like a net in the wind.

He slapped his head to our flanks one after another and listened:

“True as running clock work and not a muffle,” he said. “Ay, Hal, we owe much to you.”

Then we were off in a gallop.

Five more miles we went — ay, but it was then the joy of the going. Then we swept around the mountain that held the little town of Monteagle (for we cared not to meet any human being) and just at sunset, down into a valley we came, the sweat streaming from me in the sloping sunshine.

We had come one hundred miles — Jack said it.

In a pretty grassy valley we came to the bluff of another range of mountains, around which rushed a clear, bold creek, which poured from a great gap in the rocks where the two ranges of mountains seemed to meet.

“Here we are,” said Jack joyfully, stopping at the stream.

I looked but saw nothing but the great bluff before me,

## A Test of Grit and Speed

and a hole in the mountain where the stream poured out, forming a great pool of quiet, clear water in front, with scarce room enough for a man's body between the water and the rim of the great rocks from whence it came.

"Here we are," said Jack, dismounting and lifting Milly May to the ground. "Come, we will run no chances even for villains afoot!"

## CHAPTER XXXVI

### A HONEYMOON IN THE LAND OF ALADDIN

MILLY MAY's eyes dropped, then almost filled with tears.

"Jack, surely this is not the beautiful place you spoke of; I see only a mountain gorge and this stream. And — and — where can we stay to-night? for I am so tired and cold, and I know those terrible men will follow us afoot. They will never sleep till they find us, if we are in this country."

Jack laughed and wrapped her up in his own coat. "You shall see all I have promised, sweetheart. Come, come," and he led us all behind a great rock in a little glen in the mountain. "Now sit here a while with Shep to guard you, while I cool off the horses. They are steaming hot, and it will not do to let them take a plunge in that ice-cold water until they are cool."

As usual, Jack was thinking always of us. "I will be back in half an hour," he said, as he left, "and Shep will guard you while I am gone — eh, Shep?" And kissing her good-bye he led us away.

Our saddles and blankets were stripped from our backs, and Jack rubbed us down deftly and led us around and around slowly till we were cooled off. Then he led us again to the banks of the stream near the great bluff where the crystal waters flowed from under the mountain. Stripping off his clothes he sprang in and swam towards the mouth of the spring. We saw him swim into the mouth of it — into the dark mountain side. But in a

## A Honeymoon in the Land of Aladdin

few minutes he came back, this time sitting in a low, flat canoe, just big enough to run through the channel, and in it were candles and several lanterns. He soon had on his clothes, and leaving us stripped by the bank, he went back after Milly May. Soon they came hand in hand, Milly May wide-eyed in wondering inquiry.

"Get into the boat," said Jack, "you and Shep, and you will soon be in the Land of Aladdin."

"Where?" said Milly May, jumping lightly into the boat. "Why, what is this? I'm afraid to go into this dark hole."

Jack's answer was a laugh, and leading me and Villette into the stream, he said: "Now, Hal, my sturdy boy, you horses must swim for the next fifty yards. Hold the halters, Milly May, and you, Shep, sit up there and watch out for your head. This is Wonder Cave," he said to Milly May. "Reddy and I discovered it and come here often to hunt and fish. We have everything in there for our comfort."

He lit the lantern, and with Milly May clinging to him with one arm and holding our halters with the other, he pulled slowly under the big rocks into the mouth of the cave. We followed and were soon swimming behind the boat. At first it was very dark and the walls came down so near to the water that as we went in, all in the boat had to duck their heads. Then the walls rose higher in one great, long arch, and as the lights flashed up, I saw we were going up a long channel washed out of the solid rock by the waters. Suddenly my feet struck the sand, and almost instantly we emerged from under the roof of rocks into a great chamber, dazzlingly beautiful from roof and wall, and reflecting back thousands of diamonds in the light from Jack's lantern. The air was delightfully warm and yet cool, and the great room stood before us,

## The Gift of the Grass

filled with hanging gems and statues, beautiful groups of glittering statuary and frescoed above with what looked like stilettos of diamonds and every kind of rich and beautiful gem.

Our boat had pulled up on a beach white with sand.

"Oh, Jack!" cried Milly May, as she stepped out on the beach and gave one look. She could not speak, so great was her surprise and joy.

There were plenty of candles and oil which Jack and Reddy, in their fishing trips, had stored there, as well as fishing tackle and all things a hunter needs for his comfort in camp.

"Let us eat supper and make ourselves comfortable," said Jack, "and then I 'll light up your castle for you and show it all. Now, this is your room," he said, leading the way up a great flight of stone steps, with balustrades of stalagmite and frescoes of stalactite, and great columns of studded marble, glittering in the light. "Long ago I named it the Bride's room because of its exquisite tapestry and beauty. And you 'll find there a couch of bright, clean, wheat straw."

"I never dreamed of being in so beautiful a chamber," laughed Milly May. "Why, Jack, at a hotel this would cost us a fortune a day."

"Now I 'll leave you here a little while with Shep," he said, kissing her good-bye, "while I row out again and get the horses some corn. There is plenty of it in the fields near by. I 'll take it now and pay for it afterwards. But before I go, come down to the river Khan a while and watch me catch trout for our supper."

He took his tackle, and going down to a deep, cool hole near the mouth of the cave, where the dim light from the outside came in just enough to make the trout come

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up there for a quiet place, he soon caught two or three beautiful ones.

"Oh, I shall cook them for our supper," cried Milly May.

"Why, I forgot," said Jack; "I must build your fire in our castle's kitchen; you 'll find all our materials for cooking there, and our lard, salt, and pepper and a sack of flour and coffee. Come!"

Under a great, shelving rock of solid stalactite was a natural fireplace, going up to a great crevice in the rocks, where Jack said the smoke went out into the mountain above. Here he soon had a great fire, and then as it lighted up the great hall, so like a castle's, never did I see anything to compare with its light as it flashed up, illumining the great pillars and columns and flashing back diamonds from every point of hanging stalactite. Never was castle hall more beautiful. Jack floated out in his boat and soon returned with a sack of fresh corn for us, and we fell to, lustily, in the cool, deep sand, so restful to our tired and hot feet and limbs. And no softer bed could have been found for us, as we discovered to our delight after eating. And with him he brought two tender young squirrels which he shot in our woods, shooting their heads off with his pistol. And what a supper they had. Milly May cooking it over the great fire, which for over a hundred feet away lighted up the great castle hall.

I was very tired and nodded drowsily on the sand. The fire died down in the great hall. The flickering lights flashed now green and blue and old gold, as they found their way through prisms of purest marble and scintillating in a thousand stars above in the great dome of the castle, until, drowsily looking up, they seemed to me like millions of stars in a sky of deepest azure. And wending up and up, I saw what Jack had told us was Jacob's Ladder,

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leading up through trellises of stars and wreaths of constellations amid the great flowery paths of the milky ways.

And so I drowsed dreamily, but ere I slept I saw the beautiful picture of the lovers sitting before the dying embers of the great fire, their arms around each other, and Milly May in Jack's arms and looking up into his happy face. And ever and anon the faint flickering fire-light flashed and flashed again the picture of their happiness against the great, gleaming sides of their castle.

And so I slept.

I was awakened the next morning by hearing a splash in the little river. It was Jack, taking his morning bath in a little room near me, which was as beautiful a bathroom as one ever beheld, marble lined from top to bottom, and with clear water beneath.

Milly May had breakfast ready for him when he came back, and it was beautiful to see them eating their first breakfast together, while we ate ours, looking on. And never felt I so good, for the long ride had given me the only thing I needed — the test of endurance in a long race.

And then the lovers went to explore fully this wonderful cave. And as Jack led the way, he lit it up with candles. In the great amphitheatre where we were he pointed out the carved imitation by nature of buffalo heads, hornets' nests, umbrellas, and, most beautiful of all, a waterfall of frozen, wavy stalagmite tumbling over a great rock twenty feet high.

Jack called one room the Cave of Cyclops, for in it were great anvils. Then he went up a great stairway into a room he lighted up, making a Grand Amphitheatre, which itself would hold thousands of people, nor could the roof of it be seen, save in glittering star points of

## A Honeymoon in the Land of Aladdin

hanging stalactite. Jack pointed out a regular Niagara Falls and Cataract of the Nile, done in marble.

And then he led his bride into the most beautiful of all halls, Statuary Hall, literally filled with statuary of all kinds.

“Now step back,” he said, “and look there. Cannot one see any statue one has imagination to conceive? Why, in this beautiful hall there is as much difference between it and the real as between a beautiful dream and the awakening. It is like a story in the Arabian Nights,” he said, “like the dream of another world, like the visions of a midsummer night’s dream with fairies and goblins.”

And so he conducted Milly May from one to another, and all so different, as he said, “from sturdy columns that might have held up the porticos of the Parthenon, to the frailest stems of stalagmite, so young,” he laughed, and breaking off one, “that it looks like a transparent alabaster straw from which one might imbibe a julep.”

One by one he showed the wonders of it — the Labyrinth, with winding chambers, the King’s Chamber, the Ball Room, the Cathedral, the Ghost’s Chamber, where Jack put out the light and Milly May shrieked, and when he lighted it again he was holding her in his arms.

I know not how time went, it was all so restful and beautiful, but one day we all went out, only to find it to be night, and the moon shining, and Reddy awaiting us to go to the train with Milly and Jack and take us back. For Jack, in one of his trips out into the world again, had sent him word.

And very quiet was Reddy, and I saw that a great sorrow was in his heart, though he spoke it not. But all he said was that the Squire was storming in his anger, and could get no trace of us anywhere — and swore he

## The Gift of the Grass

would kill Jack wherever he found him. And for this reason Jack and Milly May went to the great city to stay; for Jack was in danger so great that Milly May wept at leaving their beautiful castle of Aladdin.

It was when I reached home that I learned why Reddy was so full of sorrow, for both Kitty and Sky-Eyes had gone, and their going had been in the night and their place unknown. For it seems that to save time for us when we ran off, taking Milly May to the Parson's, she locked herself in Milly May's room, and feigning to be Milly May she said she would marry Mr. Nettles if they would promise not to kill Jack. Nor would she come out, but married him holding hands through the window and under a travelling veil, which when she raised, she tauntingly said, "*And who am I but Madame Nettles, now?*" and so scorning him she fled, and taking Sky-Eyes had gone forever from the people who had condemned her wrongfully.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### THE UNAFRAID

OFTEN have I wondered why my first race should have been such a desperate one. Colts like me have colt races; but I was plunged into a struggle the like of which, the turf historians say, has not before been recorded in a century, it being their record race standing for ten long years against all comers, so recorded and so writ in their books. And yet I do not wonder, for as Billy has said, this thing we call life has always its own way with every one of us, and from the day of my birth had it not tested me with cruelty, hunger, sorrow, and that fire that is the gift of life or death? Others I had seen born to silver spoons and soft beds, their homes the rich paddocks, and their food, placed before their indifferent noses, the garnered oats of the rich valley. But mine had been the fruit of the hills upon which my mother had dropped me, and my food only the grass which was sent of Bok for all his children who would bestir themselves to get it. Ay, and looking back now, I take it as a gracious token from the Great Cause — a decoration, so to speak — an anointment, in the parable of the Whites, a sign that He, the Great It of All Things, had selected me, despised and rejected among my breed and kind, as the Little It of His purpose. And so now I see that they were decorations, my trials; and they were anointments, my sorrows; and the blows that came to crush me, ay, but they gave me the strength to stand!

All this I thought the morning of the first day of the Great Fair in the great city, where in a secluded corner

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of a lot adjoining, with an oak-tree for my sheltered home, and the sweet, rank grass for my bedding, I stood and watched the great crowd pour into the gates. From the quiet, cool spot in the corner where I stood, I could see rows of whitewashed, cool and newly-bedded stalls, with pampered and blanketed horses within them. And around on the walls hung brightly polished harness and rich blankets, with the horses' names stitched thereon in red and blue silk. And upon the walls hung pictures of famous horses in gilt and gold, and beautiful light sulkies which cost hundreds of dollars stood around, and there were two lithe, bright yellow boys for each horse. And it was there that the crowd, overflowing the grand stand, filed singly and in groups, all moving, admiring the horses and praising them to their faces.

And many of the horses had been there for a week, rested and fit for the race. But Reddy, having no money for my journey on the cars, had driven me through the country, full sixty miles, to the city. And having not even enough money to pay my stall rent, he had camped under the great tree, by the little brook, and on the cool grass. "These three things that God made free just for his own po' folks," said Reddy, smiling for the first time since Kitty and Sky-Eyes left.

Now, the truth was Reddy was not the same Reddy since that day he came home to find no Kitty nor Sky-Eyes to greet him. Then he had heard of all that had happened at the Squire's, and hot and bitter was his heart toward Mr. Nettles. And Jack had left him — for happiness — and it so happened that even the Captain had been called away by the sudden sickness of My Lady, his wife, in another town — the Captain who was to come with him and who had the great bet up for Jack, and who had the money he would have given Reddy for the jour-

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ney and the chance. And all of these happenings made Reddy hard and of a heart with a whip in it for everybody, and so, sullenly he drove me through and sullenly he camped moneyless under the tree, and mixed not with the others, but sat about, moody, and with a fierce light in his fine blue eyes.

But not once did he neglect me, from the cool clay for my feet at night, to the rubbing down and the blanket. Nor had he jogged me for trial down the track with the others, but down a long lane near by.

“Damn them,” he said (and it was the only time I ever heard Reddy swear), “damn them, Hal, they will find out what we can do soon enough!”

And then for several days we had been alone, and tomorrow was the day of the great race.

It was the afternoon of the first day that the clouds lifted for us, for Reddy’s mood had taken hold also of me. About twilight it was. I heard a laugh and voice I knew, and Jack and Milly May came across the grass through the trees to us.

“Found you at last,” said Milly May, shaking hands with Reddy, and in her old way patting my nose and sticking a big, red apple into my mouth.

“Why did you run off out here?”

“We are fixed all right,” said Reddy, brightening up for the first time. “See my tent! It’s our old tent, Jack, and I live in it; and if it comes up a rain, why I’d not mind sleeping with Hal. I’ve done it before.”

“Go get you a stall,” said Jack, half angrily, and he pulled out a bill; “we’ve got the greatest horse that ever trod the dirt of these grounds, and he shall have as good a show as the others.”

But Reddy only shook his head and said:

“Let us alone — let us alone — they’d only meddle.

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with us over there, and as for a show — well — we 'll show them at the proper time," his eyes flashing with that steel blue light I 'd learned afterwards to know so well in a tight place.

"Where is the Captain?" asked Jack; "he was to come with you. He would have —"

"Oh, that 's all right," said Reddy. "I don 't know — he did n't come. Now, don 't bother about us; it don 't bother Hal and me; we were born in a briar patch," and he tried to smile, but his mouth only quivered to a set grin split in his face.

Jack grasped kindly his hand. "We 'll be with you from now on. Do as you please — you know what is best. The truth is, Milly May and I have been so happy we have n't thought of anything else."

And Milly May coming up, put her hands on Reddy's shoulder, and then on Jack's, and smiled; and that smile told all of her happiness.

"Reddy," she said quietly, "tell me, — it has troubled us so — but Kitty — have you heard —"

Reddy tried hard to speak, but he could not.

"And Dad — Reddy —" said Milly May softly.

"I hope he will not see you yet," said Reddy. "He is armed and swears he will kill Jack at sight. He 's here — that third row is where his horses are. But don 't let him see you, Jack; he 's been drinking hard ever since you left, Milly May, and he 's in an ugly temper."

"I did so want to make up with him," said Milly May, the tears now in her own eyes.

Jack drew her to him. "We 'll wait, dear; Reddy is right. God knows I don 't want to die now — and as for killing him —"

"We 'll go away, Jack — we 'll not even stay to see the race," said Milly May.

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"He will not see us here," said Jack. "Nobody will come here, and we 'll come early to-morrow, Reddy," he said, grasping Reddy's hand. "We 'll be right here to the finish, and then," he whispered low and almost as fierce as Reddy had been, "we 'll finish them, Reddy — finish every lying coward of them — drive their very hearts out. I 've got my farm up. You know what that means. But it means more than that for us, Reddy — Nettles — that scoundrel Nettles —"

"Don't speak of him," said Reddy, turning white in the starlight. "If he crosses my path to-morrow — I 'll —"

"No — no —" said Jack, softly, "let it not be you, Reddy. It is always amid the clouds that God lays up his lightning; our clouds have been heavy — let God alone use the lightning."

And then I heard them talking of how in the paper had been published a most sensational piece about Jack and Milly's elopement, with a long story of the family feud, and the fight, and the stealing of Milly, and even of the wager of goodly land that was up on the race to-day. It was all such that Milly May said she was for hiding in the woods near us the next day, and Jack was thoughtful and troubled, for he liked not such notoriety.

"We will be with you to the finish," said Jack, in parting. And Milly May, as she patted my cheek again, pressed a kiss on my nose, saying: "You have never failed me yet, Hal — you will not fail me."

I could not speak then; but in the struggle of the race, well did she know the next day that I did not forget. And so, hand in hand, they melted away in the starlight.

Scarcely had they gone ere I heard a familiar voice. "What a place for penny-royal! By Bok, but I 've tracked you here, just following a branch of penny-royal, and here

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it is growing all over these grounds. Hey, old boy — it 's Billy on the same old drunk! What an inspiration I 'll have to-morrow! ”— and he came in butting me playfully in the ribs, and with signs of delight.

In truth I was glad to see him, for I was lonely and with that queer feeling one has before the great test of one's life — that nervous shrinking from the supreme effort, even with horses as with men. And never in all my life did I go into a great race but I dreaded the going. I quivered in the heart of me with a nameless dread, though I showed it not, and never could I throw it off until I heard the clang of the calling bell, and the thundering “*Go!*” that comes always like the boom of a great gun from the starter.

Then would I forget it all in the glory of the going. But to-night, but to-night, I had never raced, and I knew not what I could do. And was not I there with a score of other youngsters to be as carrion for the Great Eagle of the ringers? I could beat them, I knew. I feared them no more than shadows, for I had seen them all work out on the track, as I stood off alone in my little corner of the world, seen them in all their crowhopping trials of sprawling gaits and unbalanced efforts. And nearly all of them were trotters, their legs covered with leather enough to start a tannery, vainly hoping by the use of art to overcome the defects of nature. I feared them not, for full well I knew that when nature has left the something wanting in the make-up of a horse or the soul of a man, there has been found nothing in all life that can make it whole.

But Roderick the Ringer — ay, he had done it; could I?

And from the stable across the way I could hear his biting boast. For his tongue dwelt only in bitter things.

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He had spent the day in watching and ridiculing the trials of the young things that would be pitted against him, and the sharp, biting things he had said of them had become *bon mots* among the horses.

“Watch that little scrub pacer,” he had said of me.  
“Watch him, he will bury a bone in his stall.”

And thus, his wit, and his way of calling me a dog went up and down the line with much amusement and derision. To-night he was in his bitterest mood. For having drunk of the liniment in the bottle above his door, he was in his glory and boasted openly that his name was not Kentucky Prince, but Roderick, the great 2:10 pacer; that Mr. Nettles would drive him in the coming race, and that if the rest of us were good and would let his stable companion, Hambletonian-Junior-Registered-And-All-Right win, all would be well unto us. “But if you do not,” he cried boastingly, and so loud and drunkenly that it waked up Billy, who had gone to sleep right under my legs, after his long journey, “if you do not, you little scrubs, loafers, and duffers, I ’ll move out from the bunch of you and mow you down like a steel mower through a bunch of dog fennel.”

And thus could we hear him cursing, bragging, and reviling till way into the night.

And I fell asleep with his ringing taunts in my ears.

“Bah,” said Billy, ere I went to sleep, “bah — but now, Hal, I feel that thou shalt win. History is a tale that doth go round in an endless circle, and there is no change in the going thereof. Again and again it tells the same story. There are endless ages and creeds without limit and length; but for every age and every creed there is the same tale for them all. And know you what that braggart Philistine has done? He has branded himself as the Goliath of horses — thou hast heard of the great story.

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Be thou the David that shall to-morrow take his measure  
and give his carcass to the birds of the air, Hal. Thou  
knowest that I am a poet, and so do not reason; but  
know you, my friend, we have that faculty greater than  
all reason — inspiration — instinct. And as thou liveth,  
and as that inspiration is upon me now, so doth it say  
thou shalt take the braggart's measure on the morrow."

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

### THE GREAT RACE AND THE RECORD

BRIGHT and clear rose the sun the next morning, and early the crowd began to pass in through the big gates, for the story of the race had gone to the ends of the State, mixed up as it was with the runaway marriage of Jack and Milly May and the feud of the families and the open bet of the goodly land. I had never seen so many people before, but I learned that it had been the way of the people of Tennessee since the days when time ran back beyond the memory of living man or horse, to the days of one whom they called Andrew Jackson, a stalwart among men, both in the game of horses, of battles, and of State. And with the crowd came the Captain riding Villette, and she as wet as if she had swum a river for her life; and, withal, as happy as a schoolgirl in that she would see the great race she had heard of from the mouth of horse to horse.

And from that hour things looked better — both for me and Reddy.

“I am sorry, Reddy,” said the Captain, grasping the boy’s hand, “but I could not come sooner. How is the colt?” he said, giving me that quick look that sees so much with the eye that knows — “Fine! ay, that is good.”

He glanced around. “Come, lad, but we must do better than this! No shelter for such a colt? It will not do!”

“We like it best out here,” said Reddy, “Hal and I;

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well, I guess we were born to it — the open — where we can breathe good and be away from the crowd. All we want is a fair field and plenty of elbow room," he said, boastingly.

The Captain laughed. "Well, I'm here to see that you get both, or anything else that you wish. And I am here to see that you have a fair show, you and the colt. And if I do say it to your face," he said, slapping Reddy on the back, "two ruggeder, gamier sons never suckled the brown breast of Dame Nature."

Reddy smiled and turned to his work.

I watched the crowd as it poured in, and I was greatly amused at the sight I saw and the remarks of those who poured in a steady line past the stall of Hambletonian-Junior-Sir-Registered-And-All-Right. For it seems they had heard only of him, so adept are some in advertising their own greatness, and many of them had bet their sterling dollars on him, as I soon learned. And passing his stall I heard such talk as this:

*Is n't he a beauty? What a tail!*

*A magnificent horse and — such a tail!*

*What beauty and symmetry, and oh, that tail!*

"Is n't it strange," said Billy, laughing till the fence on which he stood shook, "how prone the world is to judge a woman by her hair, a man by his necktie, and a horse by his tail! And who ever heard of a tail winning a race or doing anything but keeping off flies in a lazy mood? Bah! but the world of the Great Whites is never happy unless it can mistake the drum major for the general!"

And there I saw the Squire, braggart and much drunken, and full of bitterness, which he had not the sense to conceal (being drunk), against Jack, who had stolen his daughter. Mr. Nettles, too, stood quiet and shrewd and saying nothing.

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I saw the Captain go up to Mr. Nettles and call him off.  
Then he beckoned to the sheriff to come up.

“I have my papers signed and ready to be delivered.  
Have you yours?”

“You are not going to back out, then,” said Nettles  
smiling; “I hoped you would. I hate to take a man’s  
farm for nothing!”

“I want to back out mighty bad,” said the Captain,  
with mock gravity, “but having given my word I’ve  
always been fool enough to make it good, even if I have  
to stick to a bad bargain. Yes, it’s a nice farm and I  
don’t know of a nicer man I’d rather give it to than  
you,” he added.

“Oh, thank you,” said Nettles, “and here is the one I  
hand you in return, signed and delivered, a mortgage on  
the farm of my partner. If he does n’t win this race he  
can never redeem it, and if he does — well I’ll give it to  
him and just live on the one you are so kind as to give me.”

“Take it,” said the Captain, “it’s yours already. And  
I know that you’ll enjoy owning it now that its owner  
owns your girl —”

Nettles flushed while the sheriff laughed.

“Who laughs last laughs best,” he said, hotly. “Here,  
give the papers to the sheriff, he is the stake-holder.”

And as he turned on his heels to go, I heard him say to  
himself:

“Fools! little do they know what they are up against!  
But I reckon the Squire would rather own that farm right  
now than any in Tennessee.”

Nor did the Squire know that in our tent under the big  
oak and in a stone’s throw of him sat Milly May, pale  
but star-eyed in happiness, and that it was she who, when  
Jack and Reddy hooked me to the light sulky, give me  
the pat and the red apple from the old home that sent me

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to the field with the memory and the courage of all my ancestors in my soul. Twice Reddy drove me around the track the wrong way until my great muscles limbered to the play of them and the blood pulsed quick and hot through my veins.

And now to the clanging of a bell Reddy drove me to the starting stretch, and such an array of horses I had never seen before.

The grandstand was filled and people lined the fences far up toward the infield. Again and again I heard shouts and applause as horse after horse swept by in graceful stride to his place.

But none came for me. Only from Milly May who in the tent door stood and flashed me a kiss from her pretty fingers as I turned to score; and Billy, perched on the fence near by, stood painfully sober in the tense interest he took.

There were twenty starters, a great field — for it was a mixed race for youngsters who were the pride of the paddocks of Tennessee, and though the purse which hung with a thousand gold dollars in it at the wire was compensation enough, the honor of winning meant more.

And now Fate again put me to the test, for of all the great field Reddy drew the last, while Hambletonian Junior, true to his luck and his star, drew first and the pole.

Between me and the wire were four groups of five horses. How could I ever get through them?

But Reddy cared not, sitting like a veteran driver, so cool and sullenly silent, that his mood got into me, and for once in my life I became cruelly in earnest, just as I felt that Reddy was. For as the driver is, so is the horse. And once when he saw Mr. Nettles drive by us with the Ringer I felt that quick grip go down my reins from

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Reddy's hand that telegraphed so truthfully the fieroe gripping of his own heart.

Again and again we scored, a thundering squadron of hoofs and tires, only to be called back at the clang of the bell as some wild and hare-brained colt left his stride for the air in the fright of his first race. Again and again we went back to the post. And humped low in the saddle, motionless and expressionless, sat Reddy, his heart numb with the grief of his sister's disgrace and his Sky-Eyes gone from his life.

And always behind and always the last we came to the stretch.

I did not even know when they said *Go*, for Reddy did not straighten up nor did I feel his quick message to my mouth. Before I knew it they had whirled away in a cloud of dust, and utterly indifferent, Reddy drove me leisurely behind, not a muscle of his arm moving. I wanted to go and mow them down, as I knew I could, but he held me back behind the thundering bunch.

Then little by little I saw daylight and distance breaking in between them. I saw the half-mile post flash in my face and Reddy's touch came to me with new awakening in the lines.

He was beginning to sit up, he was beginning to drive!

The first gap opened in the rear rank and Reddy shot me into it with a twist of his arm bracing me steady to my stride. Once — twice — thrice — he called on me with the same twist of his wrist and the same daring whirl into the gaping lines of the horses ahead, and glorying in the pride of the great stride of my mother I moved through them like a demon horse with feet of fire. I heard curses and calls from drivers and whips that slashed and cut, and horses that broke and floundered, being driven beyond their stride. But I heeded it not, for ahead, still

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holding the pole, flew Hambletonian-Junior, his head up in arrogant pride, while already the grandstand thundered his name in great roars of approval.

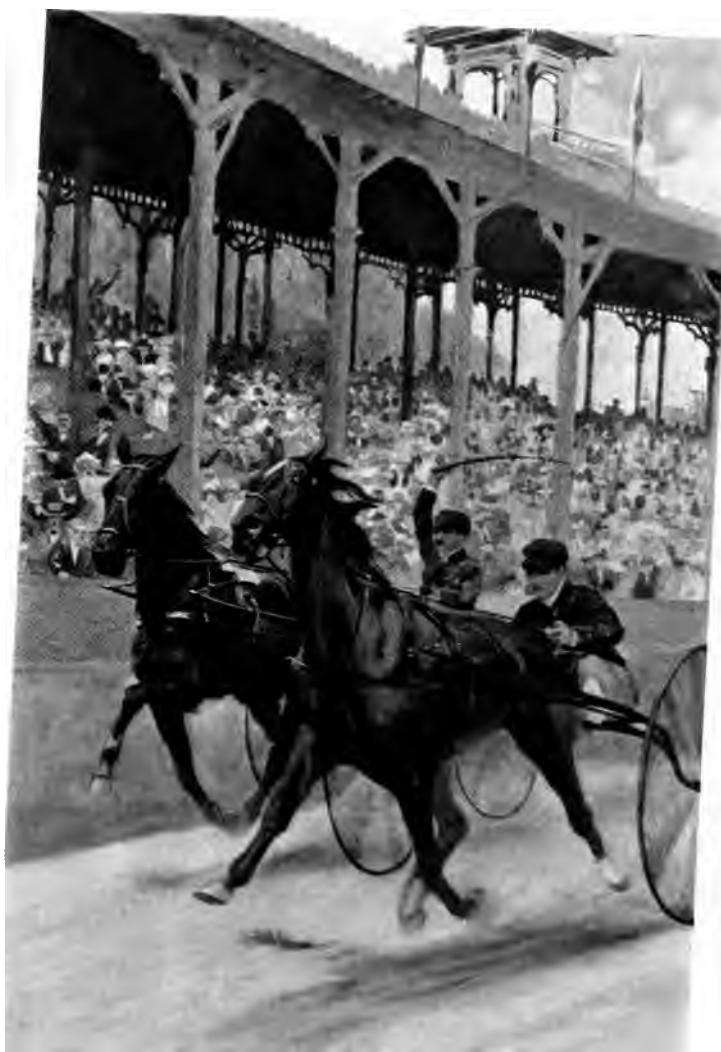
But quickly the shout died, for Reddy spoke to me with a quick grip when a gap showed clean in the front line, and I burst through it like a cyclone and collared my old enemy at the last quarter.

Up to him I went, thundering in a stride and speed so swift and fierce that men there are to this day who swear that nothing like it ever happened before or since. For I saw all my life before me, from that first day in the ditch to this — all of the wrongs I had borne, all of the injustice to those I loved, and never went I with so much glorying joy.

I heard the whip fall cruelly on him. He plunged, staggered, flew up into the air, the heart of him weltered and withered with the very fierceness of my stride. I saw his tangled break, the quitting wilt of his whole frame, the beautiful tail he had carried like a banner trailing limber and bedraggled behind, and even a glance into his pleading and beseeching eyes, and then a roar of wonder and amazement rolled, thundering my name along from the grandstand, and I passed him as the typhoon's breath goes over a craft, waterlogged and rudderless in the trough of the sea.

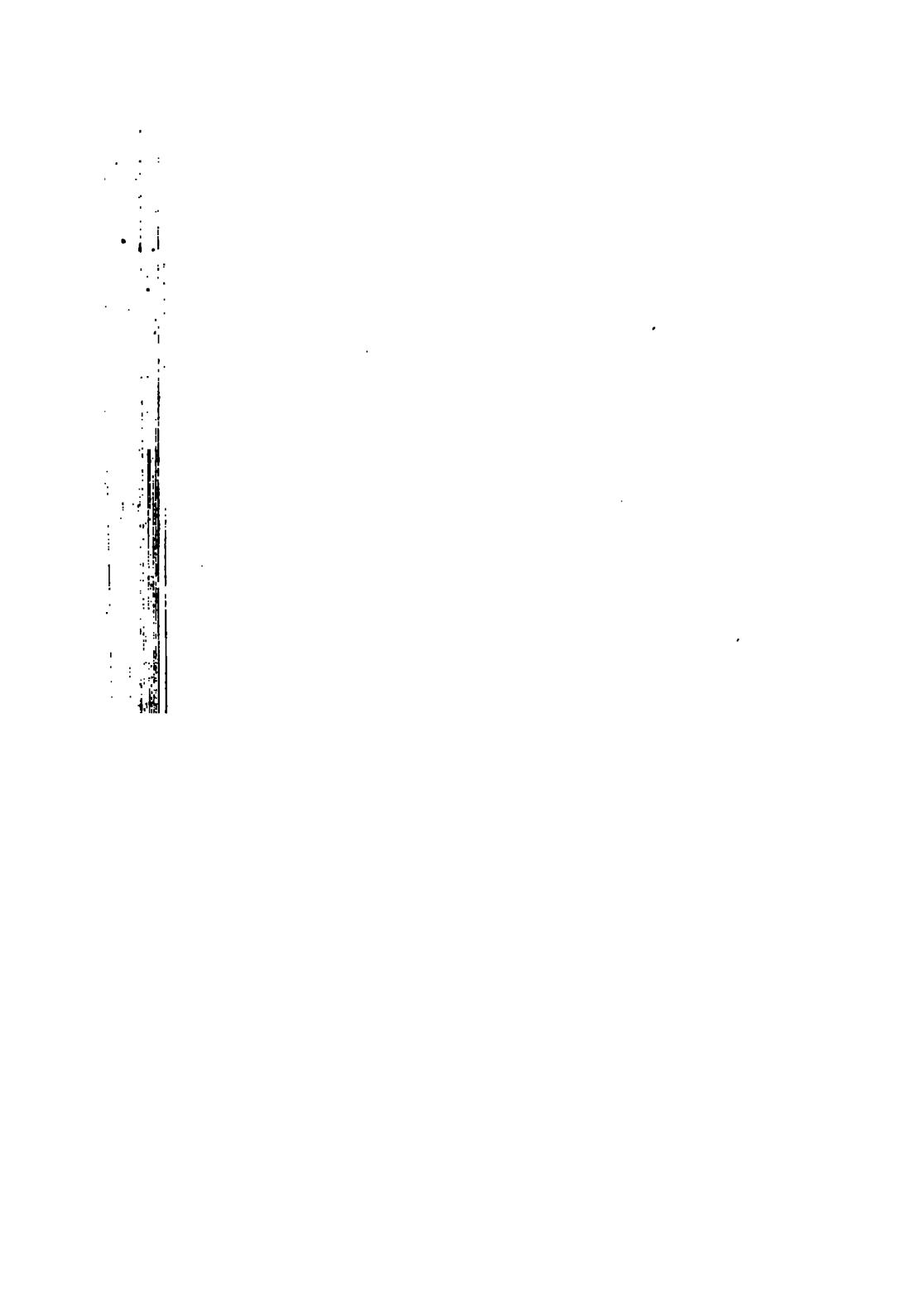
Then I heard another shout and there shot out of the bunch after me, Roderick the Ringer.

He came like a prairie a-fire before a March wind — up — up — up — so fast and so quick I felt for the first time a strange and nameless fear in my heart. I waited not for Reddy's call, but with my ears back, catching every gaining hoof-beat of the Ringer, I bowed in frenzied stride so low to the ground that I felt in my flanks the stinging sand of the track as I flew towards the wire ahead. Up



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The Great Race.



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— up — he came, his nose on my wheel — on my hub — on the shaft — at my saddle!

“*Ho — ho — ha — ha — Hemphead — give me a fighting chance,*” he shouted, arrogantly, through his quivering nostrils. And then, curses for me, curses for his driver that had held him back. “*Ho — ho — ha — ha — yellow dog — I ’ll beat you yet!*”

It is good to blaze in the anger that flamed then in my soul, for I anchored him there as a ship to a rock, and we swept under the wire, frozen, his nose at my saddle.

Thus far had he come and no farther!

And then the great mass rose up to greet me in a roar that batted me fiercely in the face.

And I laughed.

Time, 2:11 3—4!

I did not know what it meant, that other roar that broke in a wave towards me with my name on the crest of it; for no such record had ever before been made by a colt. And the Captain, smiling, had me by the bit, and the crowd surged around and would have carried me on its shoulders. But Reddy sat sullen, and not a muscle of him thrilled; and to the shouts and huzzahs and praise that pelted him like hail, he batted not an eye, save when it fell on Nettles, and then they flashed like two-edged steel from its scabbard.

Never before was I in the midst of such a surging crowd, but the Captain had thrown the blanket over me and had me firmly by the bit leading me to the shade of my tree for my cooling out. And then it was I got the first taste of that which then and afterwards was so sweet to me — the praise that follows noble endeavor. For I passed through one long lane of solid people shouting my name, and ladies threw flowers at me, schoolgirls wanted to give me their sweets, and old Southern gentlemen,

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with white mustaches and red, rosy cheeks, took off their hats as I passed, and grandly bowed with military salute.

And then I saw Roderick the Ringer, cursing me and my clan, while his great sides fluttered like a wind-mill from the terrific brush I had given him.

"Oh, if I could only have got to him sooner! I 'd have eaten him up! The little dog! Beating me! Roderick the Great! By Bok, but I 'll race his heart out the next heat! I 'll — oh, watch me — just watch me! What a joke! The little Hemphead beating Roderick!"

And then the Squire met them, pale with an astonishment so great that he was positively sober.

"Nettles, my God — what?"

"Oh, I made the drive too late — I did n't see he was coming so fast."

"But you saw the colt was done for — why did n't —"

"I didn't see him, I tell you."

"Didn't see him?" shouted the Squire. "Why, he was the only thing to be seen! He was the only thing the grandstand saw! He came through that crowd like a thirteen-inch shell through paper targets. Nettles, good God! ain't we beat? — ain't we gone?" and his voice fell again to a half-drunk wail.

"Beat! you old fool," glared Mr. Nettles, "beat! Why, how can he beat Roderick — I mean Kentucky Prince?" and he looked around quickly, and the Captain's head flashed quick as one who had heard but a little, but, suspecting much, now knew all.

"But he 's already done it, ain't he?" wailed the Squire, as they passed on.

When order had been restored again and announcements read, it seemed a most unusual thing had happened: Of the twenty-one that had started, all had caught the

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flag but Roderick and me — all distanced — and so cut out from further racing.

It was plain the cause: being colts, none of them could pace their race better than 2:25. And I had won the heat in the phenomenal time of 2:11 3-4.

Milly May had seen it all from our tent — she and Jack — for she would not let him leave her. And when I was led in she kissed me on the nose and then cried on Jack's shoulder. She could only say:

“Jack — Jack — do you remember that first night? Did n't I tell you so?”

“Why,” said Jack, laughing and pinching her cheeks, “I thought it was *I* who said it!”

“Oh, no, Jack, please let it be me. Oh, I never was so happy!”

“Wait,” said Jack; “that Prince horse is a demon. It is n't our time to shout yet! For fifty yards he fairly ate up space between him and Hal. If he'd had fifty more —”

I wanted to kick Jack, but Milly May did it for me in feigned anger, with her pretty foot.

“Go!” she said. “The idea! Why, Hal was only playing with him!”

While the Captain's two colored boys were busy rubbing me off, he called Jack and Reddy aside, and I saw them talking earnestly. Jack's face flushed hot.

“What,” said Jack, “do you mean it?”

“It is the same horse — Roderick — I remember his record well,” said the Captain.

“I knew it all the time,” said Reddy, as indifferently as if he were talking to himself.

“Of course, I see now — anybody could —” said Jack.

Jack took a turn around the tent, biting his lip.

“Well,” he said at last to the Captain, “shall we?”

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"No, no," said Reddy, hotly — "no — I want to grind the very soul out of him. I want to crush him in the very dust of defeat and dishonor. I want to beat him — beat him from wire to wire — beat him before that twenty thousand people — beat him before the world, and then we will make the charge — we will add dishonor to defeat!"

Never had I seen Reddy so cruelly mad.

"But," said Jack, "*can* we beat him? I never saw a horse come as he did. My heart jumped into my mouth —"

Reddy flushed angrily and held up his right hand.

"If I don't beat him — listen! If I don't beat him — Hal is my horse — listen! If I don't beat him never will I bring any charge. He shall have the purse and the glory, too."

"But *we* will," said the Captain, "why, that's —"

"No, you will not," said Reddy. "I am the one to make the charge. And I go this game whole hog or none. Nor will I put my foot in that sulky till you tell me I shall have my way!"

Jack and the Captain looked at each other funnily and walked off. Never had they seen Reddy like that — a man in a day — a giant among them in mind and courage.

"You are wanted by the Judges, gentlemen," said the officer, who put his head in at that minute.

"Who?" asked the Captain.

"The driver there," he said, nodding at Reddy, "and you," he said to the Captain.

"What's up?" said the Captain.

"Well, they say something is wrong — the whole thing is unheard of. Why, gentlemen," he went on, "the track record has been made and in a purse for colts."

"Tell the judges," said Reddy, springing up, "that my horse was born and raised here, a hundred men know him

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that saw him go to-day. The man that's trying to beat him bred him — ”

“Oh, it ain't you,” said the officer, pacifying Reddy, “but that other horse — it was too plain. And then they are talking about putting up another driver for him, for the reason that his driver did n't seem to be driving to win that heat. They want him to show cause why he should n't be put out of the sulky and they want you to say so.”

“Let him alone,” cried Reddy; “if he did n't drive that heat to win, I'll guarantee he'll drive the next two to win. Let him alone — let him alone. Go to them, Captain,” he said, turning and speaking to the Captain, “tell them I make no complaint. Tell them the people have paid to see a horse race and they are going to see it. Nor for my horse, as much as I love him, will I ask for anything but a fair start and a clean heat. For I am here to settle old scores,” he said, losing his voice bitingly, “old scores that started with the day this colt was foaled. And not only him,” he said, while two hot tears sprang into his eyes — “not only him — but — ”

The Captain turned and left quickly. It was Milly May who, coming up to Reddy, kissed him on the cheek.

“I am your sister now, Reddy, and Jack is your brother.”

“Always, Reddy,” said Jack, grasping his hand.

“Don't make me a weakling now — don't — ” he said, trying to smile, but only twisting his mouth bitingly about. “I thank you both — but now — just now — never did I need to be so much a *man* — a grown *man* — never so much as *to-day!*”

“You were always that,” said Jack.

“Always,” said Milly May, “but never so much as this minute, Reddy.”

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"Thank you," said Reddy, giving his attention to me.

The bell called as the Captain came back. "They roped him up," he said, "but I made no complaint. They wanted to take him out of the sulky, said he was driving for the Hambletonian colt to win and got nipped himself. But I begged them to let it pass, that he still had all the chance he wanted to win. I told them I had a bet up with him of farm for farm, and no man would play off in a race like that."

"Thank you," said Reddy, quietly, "it is as I wish. You are helping me turn the mills of the Gods to-day! And now, Hal, we'll *grind him — grind him!*" he said bitterly, and sprang into the sulky.

It was a demon Reddy who got up behind me. It was a demon horse which responded. For I have written it before — like master, like horse.

The very spirit of Reddy went into me, the steel in his soul went into mine, and I went to that fight as I never went to a dinner of oats and a rest in my life.

My muscles burned for the desperate race, my heart for the struggle. I could have paced the track had it been of fire. I would have raced it had it been spiked with nails. And 't was not for myself, not for the wrongs piled on me since the day I was foaled, not Sheepkiller, Gray Lize, the Iowa brand — thank Bok, I say it now — none of these burned in my heart; it was the wrong done to Reddy and which burned in his heart, as with whip in hand and gripped with the tense hold he had on my rein he flashed the silk above my head as we wheeled into the stretch and said softly to me, as if to ease his own mind:

*"T is Kitty, Hal — Kitty — we will avenge this day!"*

In a flash we were up with Nettles, scoring slowly for us to come.

A hush fell over the grandstand. The wave of talk and

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laughter ceased so quickly, the very lack of it (pouring so steadily in our ears as we came down for the word) seemed uncannily strange. I had felt it before, when, lying beneath the trees of a summer night, in our old home amid the hills, listening to the silvery ripple and rustle above, suddenly they became silent with that stillness that is stifling in its heavy presence, and I looked and saw a black storm stretching across the west, and storing the tongue-ful darts of lightning for the crash that is to come.

So fell the silence on us. So sat the black cloud of humanity in the grandstand in a silence that was breathless, waiting for us to score for the word.

And it arose before me, not as a living scene, but as a still, fixed picture, in a frame of field and fences.

With wheel hugged to wheel we came down for the word, so fast that the *Go* of the starter came only as an echo to my ears, as with the pole in my face and my teeth gritted squarely to the bit, braced to Reddy's strong arms I fled like a great engine, thundering in my stride and gathering speed as I went.

Not a word was spoken. I saw not the outlaw beside me. I heard only the hot flashing breath come from his quivering nostrils. I felt it in my face as we went wheel to wheel, so nearly a pair that our very buckles seemed linked. I thought of many things, for my mind seemed afire with thoughts that flashed like lightning through my brain. And some of them were in sorrow and nerved me in desperate endeavor, and others hurt and were cold. *Kitty — where was she? Milly May — what was she thinking? My mother and my good old sire — were they there — did they see their son? And Billy — was he still drunk on penny-royal?*

There — there he was! We passed him as he stood quivering on that fence, and heard him — faintly — like

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an echo floating back: "*Go it, my little David — feed his carcass to the crows!*"

Ha! — and what was that that came across the wind to me so full of mother love — so unforgetful of her son? A little neigh that spoke a book and made me spurn the track in a thunder burst of speed and pride: "*Be a Star Pointer — be a Star Pointer!*"

Up came the renegade horse — up and at me, moving, under the terrible lashings of Nettles' whip, inch by inch past my nose. Reddy's hand came grippingly. I felt his own heart beat a-down my lines: "*Ho — ho — ha — ha —*" came the snarling breath of the Ringer floating past me, which nobody heard but me, for it came in the mist of the frenzied breathing which is forced like the exhausts of a piston's breath in rapid flight.

"*Ho — ho — ha — ha!*" — he had passed me!

Was I dreaming? Was I standing still? I seemed to be — nor could I move, being as one in the grip of a bad dream, chased by a demon and yet glued to the ground.

"*Hal — Hal! — now! Now!*"

It was Reddy, and he spoke quickly, with a frightened sharpness from lips that shut on the words ere they were out. I bowed to the stride — down — down — till my flying belly brushed the quivering track that reeled beneath me like a land-slide drunken with an earthquake's shock. I seemed to pick it up and fling it behind me. My nose burned with the white heat of the hole it bored in the air before me, and yet it could not reach the nose of the flying Ringer in front, angling sidewise to snatch the pole from my teeth. My legs seemed stilts, my body dead, nor would the air rush in fast enough for my great, leathery lungs, fluttering like struggling bats within the cavern of my chest, as with mouth now wide open I flew

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after the demon horse that *ho-hoed* — *ha-haed*, just ahead of me, in derision and triumphant scorn.

“*Hal — Hal*,” came from Reddy again, and then — god of men and horses:

“*Hal — Hal — O my sweet little Hal — 't is Jim who is nigh thee — Go!*”

The Ringer seemed to stand still as if suddenly carved in marble on a pedestal that moves not, so swiftly did I stride by him, throwing my frenzied body at the wire. Nor could Reddy nor horse nor man stop me. The crowd, seeing the finish, thronged on the track below only to open as a living lane for me.

Reddy braced, tugged, called, begged — but I heard him not.

I was a demon horse flying from a ghost!

Each instant I expected to feel the pinch of Jim’s clammy hand on my neck, and I shot forward for Billy and the tent.

“*Ho, fool! stop!*”

It was Billy’s voice from his perch on the fence, which brought me to my senses at the three-quarter post. Men rushed and seized me. I was shaking, staring-eyed, and quivering with fear.

They led me back to the stand. We met Mr. Nettles and the Ringer coming in to weigh.

Then for the first time Reddy smiled. I heard it — down my lines; for Mr. Nettles’ face was spotted with hopeless fear and the Ringer was dumb, with his mouth in the sand, laboring for breath.

And one who held a watch said quietly:

“There was never anything like it! He paced those two run-away quarters in thirty seconds each. There’s the first two-minute horse the world has ever seen!”

But the time of the heat was 2:11 1-4.

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I did not see the time till we turned to weigh in, and never saw I such frenzied carrying on as that of the excited ones of the Great Whites.

"*The record,*" I heard them shouting — "*the world's record!*"

It took two policemen at my bits to carry me through the surging crowd, which shouted my name until, like a wave, it rolled from one end of the great dome to the other.

Proud and happy — ay, it is merely being honest when I admit it. And I glanced at Reddy as we passed through the crowd, expecting to see the great joy in his face. Instead, he sat utterly indifferent, but doffing his cap now and then to the fluttering groups of beautiful women who shouted his name as he passed by. But his blue eyes were lustreless and his face was drawn with white rings around his mouth, and I knew he was thinking of Kitty and Star-Eyes.

"There is one more heat," smiled the Captain, wringing Reddy's hand — "but it will be a walk-over, my boy. He is beaten and at your mercy."

Reddy smiled grimly, and I knew there was no mercy in that smile.

The judges, catching the great excitement, had come in a body to see me as I passed, and hung over the railing. They doffed their hats, smiling at Reddy. He did not even look up.

"I never saw such driving power in a horse before," said one. "He will have the pacing world at his mercy in the Grand Circuit next year."

"And balanced," said another, "did you ever see such strides? Why, it did n't look like he was exerting himself."

Mr. Nettles passed with the Ringer. Never did I see such different playing of passions in the face of any of

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the Great Whites. And yet I much admired the nerve and the control he had over himself. Throwing it off, he said gayly to the judges:

“Well, I guess you won’t call me up for throwing off that time.”

At which they laughed.

I glanced at Roderick; his head was down, his flanks in a great flutter. Even his curses and bitter tongue were silent, for he had not breath.

“Your horse is terribly distressed,” said a gentleman to Nettles, as he passed. “He has the thumps bad. You will kill him if you drive him again like that.”

“Let him die, damn him,” said Nettles, cruelly, as he passed on.

And the Squire’s actions were such as to make us laugh. Too often had he gone to the well that brews up the corn-juice, and now quite drunk and in a fury of chagrin, he stood braced by the fence as we passed, lisping:

*You sheep-pony — sheep-pony — . . . curses to me — day you were [hic] dropped. Damn me — but I ’ll — kill you at the wire — if you win — that next heat — mind now — what — I shay [hic] I ’ll do — it — you — stole my daughter — you beat — my hoss — you damned sheep-pony.”*

“Somebody had better take him in charge,” said Reddy, as we passed on; “that man is dangerous when he’s drunk.”

“It’s all over but the shouting,” said the Captain, as the deaf rubbers stripped me for the next heat. “Hal has him at his mercy.”

I saw Milly May crying softly. I saw Jack biting his mustache, and then I threw up my head quickly for I had smelt our enemy. He came up quickly to the side of the tent. He peered into our door. Disguised, his head shaved, but it was one of the Night Hawks, though Jack knew him not.

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He stood admiring me with many words of praise: "A great horse," he said, so honestly that I felt kindly at once, "a great horse!"

He tried to pat my cheek, but instinct spoke to me — the smell I liked not was on him and I drew back, snorting in protest.

Reddy glanced up. "Get back," he said quickly — "get out — don't touch him!"

Quickly the man changed and soothingly said to me: "What, old boy, afraid of me? Why, I'm your friend. See! Try this apple!"

It looked beautifully tempting as he held it out to me. Ashamed of myself for suspecting him, I had reached out to take it in my mouth — the luscious fruit — for my blood burned with the speed I'd gone and my lips were hot for the cool fruit.

It was Milly May who saved me.

"Reddy," she called quickly, for she alone recognized him.

Reddy turned quickly and slapped the apple from his hand. The man sprang to pick it up, but Reddy planted one foot on it, and facing him said, with flashing eyes, and one hand on his pistol, that hung on the centre:

"If there is poison in it I might kill you. If there is n't, let it lie — Go!"

The man glanced quickly around, and for the first time saw Milly May. He turned quickly and vaulted the fence and was lost in the crowd.

Reddy picked up the apple. There was a plug in it which removed showed a white poison in the hole.

"That is the way they would beat us," he said, as he cut the apple open and tossed it into the creek. "Nettles sent him on that errand."

"And he saw me," said Milly May. "He will tell Dad."

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"I'm thinking," said the Captain, "Dad will need us before we need him."

Never in all my racing career went I into a race so jubilantly as I did the last heat.

When I went out on the track a storm of shouts and cheers greeted us. They hurled our names — Reddy's and mine — up and down as boys do a ball. Never before did I know I was beautiful, but their own beautiful women said it! Nor had I ever dreamed that my stride was perfect nor my form beyond compare; yet their men said it. Which when Billy heard he laughed from his perch on the fence and said as I passed:

"Ha, Hal, now you know what it is to be famous! But be not deceived. Let them not make a fool of thee. In faith, you are not as pretty to-day as usual!"

But the very irony of fire had got into my soul, and when we came for the word, this is the way, from the beginning to the end of that swift mile, I rubbed the iron into the laboring, distressed, and beaten braggart beside me:

"Nice little work-out for us this afternoon, Reddy — the air feels so cool, and that early frost has painted the woods beautifully. O ho! are you out for an airing, too, noble sir — Great Roderick the Ringer? I'm sure I'm delighted to have your company, but I do hope you'll step along a little faster than you did a while ago. It's really getting chilly and I'd like to go fast enough to keep warm! Pardon me, my dear sir, but you seem to be breathing hard — a touch of asthma, I'd call it — nothing so good for it as honey and castor oil. The honey you had before starting this morning, and now I am giving you the oil.

"Don't exert yourself, for I notice that your legs are a bit unsteady. If you need help, just lean on me, my dear

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sir, I'm younger, you know, and my good mother has taught me always to help the aged.

"By the Great Bok in Haidee, but what are all those people yelling for, in the grandstand? Is somebody dead? Is this a funeral we are going to? Misguided humans, they have taken a funeral for a horse race!"

"And that poor man in your sulky — in the name of Booker's bellyband, what is he whooping and slashing and going through pantomime driving for? Is his house afire? Is his wife in distress and he thinks he is going for a doctor? By Bok, Reddy, but just turn me loose once, won't you — this is the last quarter — just from here to the wire — will you? Yes? You are telegraphing it down the lines? Well, my good friend, we part here. Good-bye."

And shaking him off, as if he had been the foam from my flecked nostrils, I buckled to my stride and moved away.

Then saw I an instrument of cruelty, the like of which was not in the annals of cruelty before. It was invented, I was afterwards told, by one Kelly, a cruel driver for the Whites who cared nought for horse nor man nor right nor God, so that he might win.

It was a foot of linked steel chain, tied to a staff of hickory and used as a whip. No crueler instrument of torture ever fell before on the flanks of struggling horse. It cuts the flesh in whelps of linked ringed blood, and a horse, feeling it once, becomes so frightened afterwards that he will die going if he hears only the rattle of it from behind.

I heard it rattling, as, rising in his sulky, Mr. Nettles cut his struggling horse with this whip of steel. Again and again it fell, drawing the blood, while the beaten Ringer, forgetting now his taunts and curses for me, in

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the pain and agony of it, bowed dumbly his head to the cruel punishment, and made a last effort to get away from the whip of steel by beating me to the wire.

Half in anger, half in sorrow, I pulled away from him and flashed under the wire.

Then, indeed, was my joy turned into tragedy. I knew not how terrific a clip I had carried the outlaw, until I heard him cough as he followed me under the wire, then stagger and reel, falling into the fence.

I felt Reddy's touch for stopping, but almost at the instant I saw the Squire rush out directly in my path with a pistol in his hand. One look at his wild eyes, his maddened face, and the pistol in his hand flashed full in my face.

*"I said I'd kill you —"*

Something stung me like a blade of fire. I knew afterwards it was Reddy's whip, and never having felt it before, and like all my kind, being able only to think of one thing at a time, I thought of the lash behind and went over the drunken man before he could fire, knocking him senseless into the fence.

Again I ran away in the pace, this time maddened that Reddy, whom I loved, should have struck me!

But Reddy, speaking softly and begging my pardon, finally brought me down, and then I saw what it all meant.

That blow from the whip had saved my life!

As I went into the shouting crowd I met the two draft horses pulling the track scraper. They were dragging off a dead horse by the neck.

And the horse was Roderick the Ringer.

At the tent Milly May was crying over a man laid on the grass and saying: "Dad, Dad, it is I — it is Milly May!"

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And Jack stood by very sorrowfully, while a surgeon took blood from the unconscious man and bound ice to his head.

It was an hour before he opened his eyes, and never saw I a man so sober.

“Dad,” said Milly May, kissing him, “forgive us!”

He tried to rise. “Where am I?”

“Lie still,” said the doctor. “You were run over by a horse. Your leg and collar bone are both broken!”

“I wish it was my neck, for I’m ruined,” he said, “and Milly May gone.”

“I am here, Dad,” she said, tenderly, and kissed him. “I shall never leave you unless you make me.”

“And I,” said Jack, “it was my fault — but I love her.”

“I am ruined — leave me — let me die — Milly May. I’ve lost all — and Nettles —”

“Oh, come,” said the Captain, breaking in cheerily. “Come, Squire, you have been all kinds of a fool about nothing. Let bygones be bygones. Jack here has won the mortgage from Nettles,” and he tossed it over on the Squire’s great breast. “He authorized me to make the bet — he risked all he had for you, and he authorized me, if he were not here, to give it to you.”

The Squire looked at Jack quickly. “Did you do that, young man?”

But Jack said nothing, and Milly May answered for him, nodding and kissing again her father, saying nothing for her tears.

The Squire held out his hands to Jack. “I’ve been a dog as well as a fool!”

“You are right,” said the Captain, laughing, “that makes it unanimous!”

And all this time I was much worried about Reddy, for not one word had he spoken when he stepped from the

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sulky. Nor did he care whether or not he had killed the drunken Squire who got in our path. And while they were bending over the Squire I saw Reddy take his pistol from tent pole where it hung, and slipping it into his pocket start from the tent towards the grandstand, saying low and between his teeth:

“Now that I’ve beat him I’ll send him with his dead horse. The dog — he knows the unwritten law of this land.”

I was glad he did not find him, for as it afterwards came to light, the judges themselves, knowing now that his horse was a Ringer, had sent for the writ to arrest him, which hearing, he had fled quickly, without even going to his stable to change his clothes.

Reddy came back in half an hour, swinging carelessly a silken sack in which were a thousand gold dollars.

“I am so proud and happy for you,” said Milly May, kissing him. At which Reddy, bursting into tears, threw the gold from him, saying:

“It was for them — and — now they are gone!”

Never slept I so sweetly as I did that night, for I held the world’s record for the three fastest miles in harness. And I held it champion for ten years, though a host of noble horses strove yearly to capture it.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

### THE TENNESSEE DEMON

I SHALL not chronicle, save briefly, the story of my turf career. It has been told by others in the turf histories of the Great White, and there it may be read of all men who love deeds of speed and daring, the victories of the unbeaten and the good red blood in man and horse. Nor could I tell it without apparent egotism and that liability to boasting which becometh neither man nor horse, who, having won out in the fight of life and in the battles of his breed, becometh unduly puffed with the glory of it. For the greatest are those who know not their greatness, and their story is the simplest and most easily told, it being the child of simplicity and from the loins of truth. Besides, looking now both before and after, nothing to me is plainer than that the credit of my great achievements should go, not to me, but to that long line of unknown, but none the less noble, horses whose courage in toil and the heavy yoke of life gave me my own courage, whose burdens borne in silence gave me my strength, and whose clean lives, lived close to nature and on the grass that giveth life and strength, gave me that health and sturdy honesty which so oft decided the contest which otherwise hung in the balance.

Therefore, in all candor and truthfulness do I say that if any deeds of mine appear here great and worthy of record, I beg that the long line of the unknown be not forgotten.

Fortunate is that man or horse who has an honest an-

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cestry, for 't is his own inheritance of honesty. Blessed is he whose forebears were healthy, for 't is his guarantee against the pills of the doctors; and thrice blessed is he who hath no cowards in the line of his descent, for 't is his own buckler in the battles of life.

And so, knowing this, I write this chapter of my victories.

Five years we followed the Grand Circuit, where I met the greatest of the turf kings. And for five years I beat them, one by one, race after race. On account of the terrific way I had of fighting it out in desperate finishes and the short shrift and no mercy I had for those who would beat me, they called me The Tennessee Demon.

The first year we won ten races and ten thousand dollars. The second year we won twelve straight races, pacing thirty-six heats better than 2:10. Reddy took home that year eighteen thousand dollars.

The third year we could get but few races — only four in all. But these few were gold mines, they being for large moneys.

The fourth year I downed in honorable combat five great horses which were tracked against me. Then it was I won one purse of ten thousand dollars.

The fifth year we got few races; and so, no comers contesting longer, The Tennessee Demon was unbeatable. In all that time I was cared for by George, my colored caretaker, and Reddy, who never left me, and whose fame as a driver equalled mine as a horse.

One Christmas night in the old home on Reddy's farm, which he bought of the Captain, and where he and Kitty had lived, and where we wintered every winter, I heard George telling the Captain and other visitors how we beat Montana Maid; and he told it so quaintly that I enjoyed it myself at the time, and his listeners received it with

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roars of laughter. And so I put it down now as a sample of them all.

"Oh, yessah, we licked 'em all — me an' Hal — but we sho' got at Clevelan', Ohio, the race we remember bes' of all. That wuz when Montana Maid come out against us wid her banners flyin' an' a brass band an' all her fo'ks there to see her beat our hoss.

"How they did brag on that mare! They said she cu'd beat any hoss livin' — that she cu'd go away with a rush that would paralyze us — that she cu'd pace a half in a minnit. Now our record for the mile wuz two-nine, an' every second over that meant beatin' us fifty feet.

"I liked dat Montana Maid. She was a big, rangy mare, sixteen hands high, an' paced like machinery — she cu'd pace quarters in twenty-nine seconds and a half in a minnit, es I sed, an they sed she would carry us so fast she 'd cook us the fust mile! That sounds mighty funny now — cookin' ole Hal! They never was a hoss livin' that cu'd do it!

"I guess they found out who was cooked befo' they got through wid us.

"Marse Reddy heard about their scheme an' he sot off by hisse'f an' think up one of his own. I tole 'im about what they wuz gwine ter do — carry him the fust quarter in thirty secon's. He riz up an' sez: 'Wal, George, a mile is jes' fo' quarters, an' all we got to do is to finish the last one fust.'

"I seed Marse Reddy had blood on his whip fur dat day!

"The mare came from the West, an' it looked like all Montana was there. An' it wa' n't nuthin' but *The Maid!* *The Maid!* ontwell I got sick of the very name. I would n't a rid that ole mare to mill ef they 'd gib her to me. Why, eben the ladies all come out in their finery, all friends of

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the Maid, an' one of 'em wuz the wife of the man that owned her, an' a mighty fine 'oman she wuz.

"They wuz a man there named Dr. Tanner, that was a great friend of me an' Marse Reddy an' Hal. He come an' gib me a hundred dollars an' he sez: 'George, go play it on Hal.'

"I tuck de hundred an' went ober an' tole Mr. Andy Welch I wanted pools on Hal. He laugh and say: 'Look here, boy, you 's gwine ter eat 'possum this winter, too! Wal, if you don't look out, you 'll hafter work yo' way home!'

"But I tole 'im I 'd ruther work my way homebettin' on my own hoss than to win out on a pacin' skate an' ride home in a Pullman sleeper!

"Wal, suh, when the race come they played the Maid jes' lak I tole Marse Reddy, an' she went away from the pole like a bullet. Marse Reddy jes' let her go an' gib her all the rope she wanted. Hal had to go a half to git his heart to pumping good. He never wuz much on spurts from the start, but he sho' wuz hell in the home stretch at the finish!

"The Maid she flew, an' the Maid she flew, but ole Hal he jes' come pacin' along. An' she flew, an' she flew, an' look back at 'im, but ole Hal he jes' come pacin' along. Then she flew faster an' look lak she gwinter burn the track up, but ole Hal he jes' kep' pacin' along.

"At the three-quarters post she wa'n't so frisky, but ole Hal he jes' kep' pacin' along. She tried to put on another spurt, but ole Hal he jes' kep' pacin' along. Den he come up to her, an' he bows an' lif's his hat lak the gentleman he is, and she smile an' say: '*Good day, Mr. Hal; had n't we better take it a little slow from here home?*'

"But ole Hal he jes' kep' pacin' along — faster an' faster, along an' along, sayin' nuthin' but jes' a pacin'.

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hot pickle. Lawd! it wuz a race! Inch by inch ole Hal went by her. She had pacin' bloomers on an' you cu'd a played craps on the tail of her sweater. She also had on her *busile*, but what she needed was *hustle*!

"I felt sorry for her when ole Hal made dat turrible brush of his'n in the home stretch. I seed hysterical tears fly from her eyes, I seed her shriek, h'ist her skirts an' try to climb on a chair lak she dun seen a mouse, an' den I knowed she wuz ready for Mrs. Pinkham's female tonics an' the antipolygamy bill!

"It was ole Hal fust in 2:10!

"An ole Hal jes' pacin' along.

"Wal, suh, you shu'd a-heurd me shout! I knowed it wuz all up wid the Maid an' dat Marse Reddy dun took her measure. I knowed, too, when Marse Reddy paced the fust heat to a finish he meant business; but, do you b'leeve it? — them fo'ks kep' sayin' she 'd win, an'bettin' their money! But some ob de gamblers seed through it, an' that wuz when they offered Marse Reddy twenty-five hundred dollars to let the Maid win.

"Marse Reddy tole 'em to go to the debble!

"Then he went right out an' played the same tune wid her jes' lak he dun the fust heat, only this time he beat her in 2:10 1-4.

"An' still them Western fo'ks would n't gib it up. They sed that wuz all right — the Maid would beat 'em the next heat. I never seed sich fo'ks — they 'stounded me. It seems to me they wuz long on faith but short on hoss sense. Sez I, 'Marse Reddy, whut 'll convince them fo'ks?' Marse Reddy sed, 'Nuthin' but the nex' heat!'

"Wal, they had it, an' it wuz a heat! At the word the Maid tuck the pole an' led to the half by a length an' a half, an' as Marse Reddy did n't move up promptly, they

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all begun to shout: "*The Maid! The Maid! It's her race! Hal is dun fur!*"

"Marse Reddy wait his own time, an' at the three-quarter pole he pulled Hal to the outside so she could n't interfere with his finishes, an' Hal made dat same ole rush an' went by her lak she wuz standin' still.

"As we went out I seed the pretty 'oman whose husband owned the Maid cryin' lak a schoolgirl, she wuz that heart-broken.

"An' that 's how we beat Montana Maid."

## CHAPTER XL

### THE STAR

AND thus for five years I held my own against all who faced the starter with me. And though they brought out many noble horses to contend for the money and the fame which were theirs if they could beat me, not one, if he went with me to the wire, but had cause to remember "The Demon of the Backstretch."

And Reddy was known as the Silent Driver; for he was not the same since that night he came home to his little cottage and found neither Sky-Eyes nor Kitty there. In one night he sprang from a boy into a strong, silent man. The world lay before him to be conquered — before him and me — and we conquered it. Honest, fearless, kindly of heart, without malice or fault, he proved to be a born general in battle, a very demon for the fighting finish.

In those five years he became the greatest driver who ever sat behind a horse. But for him I could never have done what I did, and with pride and affection I say it.

Ay, and I loved the game — 't is the noblest sport of kings! And history's pages bear record to the fact that the horse and the hero go ever together. From remotest ages he has come with man, side by side, in the glory and achievements of the white race. In all the darings and doings of the Saxon, wherever countries were to be conquered, battles fought, and the banner of Britain carried 'round the world, wherever has been a footprint there also was the hoof-beat.

Ay, and I do love the sport of it — the tracks, the

## The Star

stables, the care they took of me, the cheering crowds, the bruising races, the desperate finishes, the glory of victory!

Year after year, in pacing my races, I cut my record down until it hovered nigh the two-minute mark. This no horse had ever been able to reach in harness, and to attain it was the noble endeavor of breeders all over the land.

We wintered in our Tennessee home, but our summers were spent in goings from city to city, where great crowds turned out to see the great races. And from a plough-boy and son of a poor cropper, Reddy had grown to be the owner of lands the equal of those of the best of them. Kindly, silent, and quiet, he went his way, even as I did, loving our kind and of no conceit or malice; but scoring down with some great horse that had been pitted against us, before great thousands who had backed our speed, courage, and honesty with their dollars, at the word *Go!* in a flash did we change, and in a life and death struggle we became in truth the very demons of the backstretch.

And so the sixth year found us barred — no one would race against us. Then it was that Reddy said: "We will capture the highest honor — the two-minute record — and go back home to Tennessee for good, I to farm — you for a pension on the blue grass!"

In all that time we had heard no word of Kitty or Sky-Eyes. But one night, while a great race meeting was on, near a great city by the sea — the largest city of all those built by the Great Whites — and there being no engagements for us at all, while Reddy drove me in a light cart for exercise through a thoroughfare, in the full glare of the lights and amid the passing throng of thousands, there floated out from a theatre opposite, the high pure notes of a voice that stopped both Reddy and me, as if we had

## The Gift of the Grass

suddenly been carved and set upon a pedestal in the street.

It was Kitty's voice, but Kitty's trained — glorious!

We stood listening — me, the demon horse and conqueror of my kind.

For as she sang I heard every bird in the woodland of the old farm, from the meadow-lark, when he sits with dew-wet breast in the early morning on the swaying top of a slender paw-paw, and with spreading tail and uplifted crest pours his liquid melody to the incense of the sun, to the hermit thrush — with voice as rare even as Kitty's — and who sings only in the farthest and deepest woods, as if he thought his melody too sacred for seeing eyes. I was sad, happy. I was happy in my sadness. Gone were my glories, my fame, the great races I had won, the applause of thousands, the championship of the world! For a bubble's breath I would have given them just to go home again. Just to go home and rest with Mother on the blue grass — to see Kitty again in the cornfield — just to —

It closed and I awoke with a sweet surprise, as one in a dream — a dream woven by the voice that came out of the great building.

We heard the roar of applause as the house rose to meet her, then wave after wave as it came again.

I felt the telegraphed emotion that had sent the tears down Reddy's cheek. He too had dreamed, and then I knew what being a great artist meant — picturing dreams. "Art," I said, "art is making dreams alive."

Then Reddy glanced at the billboard. It announced Grand Opera and the star, Mlle. Katherine.

He was deeply stirred. "Katherine — Kitty — my God! I had hoped never to hear of her again — to have left me as she did — to have taken Sky-Eyes. And Nettles —"

## The Star

He wrenched me cruelly with the bit as he straightened up and sent me spinning down the street to our quarters at the track. For the first time he turned me over to George, my caretaker, without himself seeing me bedded for the night.

He slept next to me, and all night I heard him walking the floor.

## CHAPTER XLI

### THE CHALLENGE

ON the morning after we heard Kitty sing, Reddy, even more silent and more thoughtful, sat in his camp chair near my door, when there came up a gentleman and lady, choicely dressed, the man in a driving suit, cap and gloves. I noticed them particularly, they seemed so refined and kindly, and the lady's eyes caught me at once, for there seemed in them the shadow of a great sorrow.

"We should like to look at your horse, if you are not already overburdened by too many insistent admirers," said the gentleman to Reddy.

Reddy, with the bitter thought on him, scarcely noticed them — so great a throng there had been all morning around my door — but he nodded his head and shot his thumb back towards my door.

They came up, and then my kindness prompted me to put out my head for the lady's caress.

Instantly a look of pain swept over her face as she turned to the gentleman and said: "How much his head and neck resemble old Jock!"

The gentleman glanced quickly at me and then at George; then he handed my caretaker a silver dollar. "Would you be so kind, my lad, as to remove his blanket for a moment?"

George, grinning and pocketing the silver, complied, and the two stood looking silently.

Down the woman's cheeks two tears rolled, which she hastily wiped away with her lace handkerchief. The man

## The Challenge

said nothing, but I could see that he, too, was deeply affected. At last he said, drawing his arm through hers affectionately: "You are right, my dear — I never saw a horse before that looked so much like old Jock."

I put out my nose for the caress the lady gave. I whinnied softly, thinking Reddy would enter and tell them of Sky-Eyes, but he heard them not.

"I can see our darling Lilian on his back now" — she was crying softly. The man had turned away to hide his own tears and was watching the horses whirl past in the work-out on the track.

Oh, that I could have spoken or made Reddy hear!

George had put the blanket back, and though they said no more, they were loath to leave me.

Reddy came up and stood silently watching George blanket me.

"I see from the morning papers that you have been challenged," said the gentleman after a while to Reddy.

He looked up quickly, his indifference all gone.

"I had not seen it, sir," he said quietly.

The gentleman pulled a paper from his pocket; it was in large headlines, and Reddy scanned it eagerly. Then his face grew livid with white anger, but very deliberately he spoke, with himself under control.

"This man Nettles who drives him, I know," he said quietly; "but the horse, this stallion, Ivan the Man Eater, as they call him —"

"I know the horse," said the gentleman. "I saw him race at Lexington last month. He is seventeen hands high and a demon incarnate. I never saw such speed as he has. I saw him pace the first quarter of his mile in twenty-eight, the half in fifty-nine seconds. They call him the Man Eater because he has killed three men in his life and a number of horses. They tell a weird story

## The Gift of the Grass

about him in Lexington. His owner, who bred and raised him and who discovered his great speed, had a negro caretaker to whom Ivan, the horse, was much attached, permitting no one else to touch him. One night the negro got into a quarrel in the stable and was killed by another groom, his throat slashed by a razor in a desperate fight in front of the horse's stall. At the sight and the smell of blood the horse became crazy, broke down his stall, attacked and literally mangled the murderer of his caretaker. He shook the dead body in his teeth, as does a dog a rat, and raged for two days, taking possession of the stable. In their attempts to subdue him he killed two more men and foamed up and down the stable like a wild beast. Surgeons who looked at him pronounced him hopelessly insane and ordered him shot. No one dared go into the barn, and they were proposing to shoot him where he stood. But it seems there had been sleeping in the barn a drunken fellow who had once been a driver, but who now was a wreck and hung around the race tracks, picking up what he could. This man had slept off his drunken sleep in a stall, and, coming out, met the Man Eater face to face. The horse pitched at him in fury with teeth bared and ears back. Some one seized a rifle to shoot, while others called to the man to climb the ladder leading to the loft. Instead, he advanced boldly to the horse, calling him a strange, unheard-of name. It ended in the horse actually fondling him and permitting the man, whose name was Nettles, to lead him by the mane into his stall. But he permits no one else to come near him, and at sight of a negro near his stall, he goes into violent spells which only Nettles can control. It ended in his owner giving Nettles a half interest in him. And that is the horse and driver you must meet or give up your championship. So sure are they that they can beat you, that a syndicate has

## The Challenge

backed him. There is their challenge to you for a race of \$20,000 a side over this track next week," he said, pointing again to the paper.

"Twenty thousand," said Reddy, as if thinking with himself. "I have got tired of the game. I want to go back home — I and my horse — back to the old farm and rest. Don't we, Hal? We 've earned it," and he patted me affectionately. "I guess we 'll have to give up the belt," he smiled. "I have n't that much money to put up — and besides —"

"I will put it up for you," said the gentleman.

Reddy looked at him quickly. "If you 'll take half the purse —"

"I want nothing," said the man; "you and your horse are the kind I love to back."

Reddy smiled and shook his head, which, when the gentleman saw, he finally agreed that, if we won, half the purse should be his for the backing.

"And we will do our best, sir," said Reddy quietly.

## CHAPTER XLII

### THE COMING OF THE MAN EATER

NEVER was a race so talked about. Through the country it went in the daily press, and before three days it required extra policemen before my stall door to keep off the crowds who thronged to see the champion who was to fight for his belt. Never was a darky so proud of me as George, my colored caretaker, and many hundreds of their coins he took in for the privilege of a peep into my stall door. And Billy, my mascot, who had slept in my stall throughout my whole career, stuck to me now closer than ever. And proud was Billy, now as famous as Reddy and myself, for there had never been taken pictures of me, the unbeaten pacer from Tennessee, but that Billy, my mascot, had posed with me. And though up to all his old gaits was Billy, and full of fun as well as philosophy, we became inseparable in our great friendship. Many were the blunders he kept me from, in his wisdom, and many an inspiration he gave me in the day of my sore trial, in my desperate battles for supremacy. In our first campaign in the North for a while he was not himself and I wondered what ailed him.

"May Hulee engulf that country, Hal," he said to me one night when we first started out on our career, "that does n't grow penny-royal. It will have no poets, no literature, no inspiration. Without it no great dream was ever dreamt, no great music ever was made, and, as for our people conquering the world without it, they never

## The Coming of the Man Eater

would get over the first mountain. Bah! but I 've been here a week, and I have n't got up flow enough to write a quatrain on 'The Nanny Goat I Never Knew.'"

In a few days, however, he felt better, for he discovered a weed which grows North and which they call High Jinks — "a little stronger," he said than pennyroyal, "and the inspiration is not so soft and mellow as that which comes from the Southern product, but it gets there all the same."

In a few days, in a special car, came Ivan the Man Eater, and never saw I so great and so proud a horse. From his eyes there flashed that demoniacal fire that told us so clearly that he was in truth a demon-horse, vicious as ever went mad, witch-ridden, beneath summer moon, and with the great sunken holes above his eyes in the forehead where Nature had tired and quit before fully finishing his brain.

"He is dangerous, Hal," said Billy, who was eyeing him closely, for the car had been run out on the side track, which stopped at the great stable in which we had been quartered, and it took five stout grooms with pitchforks and halters to get him into a stall expressly prepared for him. "He is dangerous," repeated Billy thoughtfully, "for Nature has made him a great ship with the force and the power, but without the rudder."

And from that moment Billy, guardian that he ever was to me, watched every movement of the mad one.

Upon the horse's head was a great halter of double strength, around the mouthpiece of which was a steel band which muzzled him, that he might not bite and tear with his great teeth. From this mouthpiece went a stout chain, fastened by a leathern thong around the fetlock of his foreleg, so that he could not strike the death dealing blow with his great fore feet. As he

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came off the cars he glared savagely, snorting derisively at the long row of timid horse heads thrust out to see him.

“Ha! little minions of man, little ponies with bits in your mouths to do a master’s will! Do you crane your necks to see for the first time a Horse?”

In a great stall of extra strength and size he was placed; and then there came out of the car a man, stooped, aged before his time, with cruel, bitter lines writ all over the red, puffed, and shameless face of the debauchee and wine-bibber.

But for the sickening smell which was still on his breath, I had not known it was Mr. Nettles.

The grooms with the pitchforks drew back as he shambled up carelessly, and fearlessly went into the Mad One’s stall.

“Ha — Ivan, old boy,” he said, patting the horse on the face, while he slipped the halter from over his head and unclamped the thong at his foot; “ha — old boy, ten thousand pardons for treating you this way,” and he laughed jocularly into his face as if he were coaxing a man who knew. He patted him again: “Had to do it — not for your sake — oh, no — great conqueror of men and horses — what do you care for these baubles? But I know your tricks, you conquering hero, and we must see that you don’t eat up the little fellows who wait on you, nor the ponies that would beat you in a race.”

And the Mad One, in his horse way, laughed as if it were a joke, and Nettles walked harmlessly around, feeding him as if he were a great pet dog.

And the Man Eater laughed sillily like a great idiot boy, pleased with a toy, and he would nudge Nettles with great rough strokes of his nose that would toss him half way across the stall, which Nettles noticed not, but laughed

## The Coming of the Man Eater

back at him, teasing him for a great quitter and one who could not race.

And the while the Man Eater laughed in great horse guffaws, as though he saw the meaning, and then he fell to eating gluttonously.

Nettles, whom the Man Eater would alone permit to chain him, replaced the halter and chain when the great horse had finished, and came out, securely locking with a great chain the double doors.

Coming by my stall he glanced to see that Reddy was not nigh, and he shambled up, pretending to speak to George; but all the time I knew his cruel eyes were on me, and, despite my efforts, the great fear that seized me at sight of him that first day I was foaled again came upon me, and I snorted, drawing back into my stall, and pawed the earth in my efforts to break away.

"Ho, Hal," said George, "this is Marse Nettles — you know him."

Nettles smiled and shook George's hand. "Glad to see you, George," he said, giving the care-taker a cigar, "old friends don't meet often." George, pleased that he was noticed, talked glibly, but all the time Nettles was watching me. I felt his keen eyes run over me from my head to my heels, and as they passed I felt the heat wave run down me as the fierce effort that came with the brush in the homestretch. I felt his eyes lingering on my tendons in sharp, quick, feeling waves, as if he would look through my legs to see if any weakness was there; then he turned to George:

"We are old friends, George," he said, "and I'm glad to see you again. For old time's sake we'll take a little of old Kentucky," he said, drawing a flask from his pocket.

"Oh, I can't, Marse Nettles," said George, looking around with eyes that wanted to, but dared not. "Marse

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Reddy — I promised him — I 'd never — it 's agin his rules — not while I 'm caretaker of Hal, you know!"

Nettles did not reply. He only looked at George, and in his eyes I saw the yellow fire of Sheepkiller, the conquering cruelty of the Man Eater, the overmastering fierceness of the strong, born to command the brainless and the weak.

George, ashen, shaking, and coward to his heart, took it, quaffed, and then, unable to look into Nettles' eyes slunk back behind me, while his new master with a laugh walked in. From that hour I mistrusted George. I knew then in his weakness and cowardice he had sold out to Mr. Nettles.

And a great fear came over me.

## CHAPTER XLIII

### THE PEAK AND THE STAR

I HAD not been exercised that day, and after supper, the moon shining full and bright, and thousands of lights dancing in as many thousands of halls, making one great lane of light cityward, Reddy had me hooked to the light road cart and turned my head towards the big town. The sight of Nettles that day had strangely affected him. Not once had he spoken. The grim silence which had hung to him so many years seemed, to-day, to have settled with a cruel grip around a mouth which once was the home only of kindly smiles. Not once had he looked towards the stables of Nettles — not once at the Man Eater.

I did not know his destination until we reached the great theatre where blazed the lights, and great billboards told of the Grand Opera in which Mlle. Katherine, the Star, would sing that night. In an alley which ran by the theatre he drove, and just opposite the side entrance, through the windows of which some of the rear of the stage could be seen, he drew me up at the door of a neat little public stable opening on the alley. The jolly fat owner sat in the doorway, fanning, and listening to the opening airs which floated from the orchestra.

Reddy nodded, and the little man jumped up, a great smile spreading over his face.

“Why, I am honored,” he said, beaming on us, “honored — you and Hal, too? I have n’t had such a horse here since Mr. Bonner used to put up with old Maud S. when he came to town.”

“We knew we would be safe here, Nick,” said Reddy

## The Gift of the Grass

quietly. "I wanted to come in to hear the opera. From now on I intend to sleep with Hal myself."

"I should say so," said Nick, helping Reddy to take me out. Then he patted me kindly, laughing: "Glad to make a closer acquaintance with you, Hal;" he went on talking to me as naturally as to Reddy himself; "you 've carried many a dollar for me in the last five years, and you have never quit on me yet. Nick's whole wad is up on you Saturday. I 'd bet my babies, if they were n't too precious for a price — ho, ho!" and he laughed, shaking his fat sides and patting me again.

Then, as he stripped off the light harness, he stood me in the light, a great smile on his face: "God, but he 's fit to race for a kingdom!"

"How much have you bet, Nick?" asked Reddy, as if worried.

"Five thousand," said Nick proudly. "It 's all I 've got except the stable. I was awful lucky to get that bet," he went on — "and Jimmy McGuire, he 's got ten thousand up — and Andy — and McCloud — whew! Reddy, why, there 's thousands up on Hal! Hang the Man Eater and his quarters in twenty-eight seconds! The old Guard of the Grand Circuit will go broke and walk home before they will go back on their old hero!"

"I am sorry," said Reddy after a while. "You know, Nick, I have never wanted my friends to back us — but — well — I can't help it. We can only do our best," and he laid his hand with a touch of tenderness on me for the first time in months.

Nick broke out into a laugh: "No, you can't help it! can't help being honest — can't help being the greatest driver living — can't help owning the greatest horse that ever lived — and, by gad, we can't help backing such a combination!"

## The Peak and the Star

"I don't know," said Reddy, shaking his head; "I don't know — things don't feel right to me. And that half he paced in 59 —"

"Bah," said Nick, "he'll pace his first half in 59 — yes. But the last half — ha! ha! — there's where this old iron thunderbolt will come in!" — and he slapped me on the neck.

Reddy smiled. "We'll do our best; but till Saturday, the day of the race, we are going to stay here with you. The crowd bothers us there — and — well —" his face set in that grim way again. The blood left his lips and I saw his hand grip angrily the sulky shaft, as if steadyng itself.

"What? Sure?" cried Nick — "good! By gad, I'm honored. Here," he cried to a hunchback negro boy who came forward, "give him this first stall — it's four in one — turn everything else out on the curbs of Broadway — anywhere — for this roof shelters the King of them all!"

The little hunchback negro came forward and took my bit, his eyes shining with the honor of it.

"Hello, Buck, don't you know me?" said Reddy kindly.

The hunchback studied him closely, scratching his head. "'Pears like I do, boss; yo' face 'pears mighty complicated — like I'd seed it befo'."

Reddy laughed. "Have you any children, Buck?"

The negro's eyes ceased shining. "A little sick one, boss, an' it looks like he won't git well —"

"Here," said Reddy, pulling out a hundred-dollar bill, and handing it to him — "bet this Saturday on the horse you are leading, and then take your sick kid to the seashore."

The negro's eyes filled and then glittered to great joy. And from that moment he never left me.

Reddy had slipped away, and I saw him go into the theatre.

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Then presently there came, clear and soft upon the air, the midnight song of the first mocking bird that I heard amid the blue hills of Tennessee — beginning dreamily in a lilac bush and floating upward to a star, then pulsing in throbbing chords across the great banjo face of the mid-summer's morn, fell drowsily and dreamily sweet into my ears.

Reddy was back again — in my stall — his great strong frame shaking.

The play was over. There were calls after calls, and roars of applause, and I saw a woman, queenly beautiful, bowing amid great banks of flowers. And one whom they called the Governor of the State left his box and came forward, leading her by the hand to the front of the stage, amid thunders of applause. And on his handsome face was admiration and in his eyes a love writ deep, a great desire to own so beautiful a thing.

And my heart all but burst in its pride as I said: “Ah, teacher in the backwoods, ah, little village of cruel tongues reared in the narrowness of the Church-That-Runs-in-the-Family — behold Power and Place at the foot of the Peak and the Star.”

“My God!” cried Reddy, gripping me, “look!”

The Governor was leading her proudly back and a staff of brilliant uniforms were following, when there came to meet her and kiss her a younger and, if possible, a more beautiful one.

“Sky-Eyes — Sky-Eyes!” cried Reddy.

He sat in my manger, this strong man who, in the battles of an hundred races, had taken his life in his hands amid the flying thunder of desperate feet and wheels of fire, and never moved a muscle of him in fear when the pinch was on, nor joy when the great fight had been won; who had ridden for five years through tempta-

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tions which would have blown a weak man out of the sulky as a cyclone blows a leaf, and never had fallen. In races where great sums were up and where the winking of his eye would have sold him to the devil and his breed, he had never yielded. In finishes when fortunes hung on the wire and men's honor and their gold, and by the lifting of an arm he could have changed right into wrong and gone home with gold enough for a king, he had never swerved.

This man now wept, shaking with great sobs, like a child.

In her private parlor behind the great stage of the beautiful building she now sat alone with the Governor, the flowers in banks around the room and piled high on a grand piano upon which she had sung to the playing of Sky-Eyes. And now Sky-Eyes had retired, and the throng of brilliantly uniformed men who were of the Governor's staff, and they sat alone.

"I was proud of you to-night, Kitty," he said at last and sitting near her on the sofa.

"I was not so proud of myself," she said; "I did not sing that last aria nearly as well as I did in Berlin, where I got less praise for it from the German critics. O, but I like the Emperor — he was kinder than the critics." She went to a desk and brought out a medal, laughing; "Here is his decoration," she said, holding up the beautiful jewel.

"I have an offering," he smiled — "I could not call it a decoration, Kitty, — but it comes from the heart —"

The tone of his voice warned her and she arose, laughing.

"Now, please don't, my friend," she said, coming up and putting her hand on his shoulder comradely. "I have that desk full of them," she laughed warily.

"Be mine," he said. "Kitty, why won't you let me tell you what everybody knows but you — even the

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papers of my political enemies —” he smiled. “You cannot doubt me longer — there has been no woman who has been but a shadow since I saw you a year ago!”

She smiled down on him seriously, her hand still on his shoulder. He reached up, putting his own on it, but she withdrew and smiled quietly down into his eyes.

“Listen,” she said, “and let us make a bargain. There is a strange mood of old memories on me to-night — and — and — well — you know I am tired and must rest.”

He arose quickly. “Forgive me; I should have thought of that. I am selfish, I know — I should go. But I love you, Kitty.”

“Let me sing you an old song that is in my heart to-night before you go.”

“Shall I try to interpret it as you sing?” he asked.

“As you will,” she smiled, and going to the piano again there floated from the lilac bush the same music as of old.

“Could you come back to me, Douglas, Douglas,  
In the old likeness that I knew,  
I would be so faithful, so loving, Douglas,  
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true.

“Never a scornful word would grieve ye,  
I ’d smile on ye sweet as the angels do —  
Sweet as your smile on me shone ever,  
Douglas, Douglas, tender and true.

“I was not worthy of you, Douglas,  
Not half worthy the like of you;  
Now all men beside seem to me like shadows —  
I love you, Douglas, tender and true.”

She sat still when she had finished. He came quietly up, looking down into her eyes, moist with the tears of memory. “I think I understand,” he said; “but can you

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blame me if I, who have never been defeated, never failed to win what my heart earnestly desired, that I should refuse to let you go out of my life because of an old love?" He stooped low over her until his fine face touched her hair.

"Kitty, women to me before have been but painted dolls. I have been selfish, I know. In my fight for place and power I have passed them all as playthings, until now, to-night — You have heard the news," and his fine face sparkled with great pride — "my life's ambition is satisfied. I was elected to the Senate this afternoon. Now — now — complete this life's happiness by promising to be my wife — in your own time, Kitty — sweetheart — I am not urging you save that you give me hope —"

"You said," she smiled up at him, "you were going to interpret my song —"

His strong face relaxed. "Interpretation depends on the soul of him who interprets. Love now, as always, has never had an interpreter, and only one man ever came near it, and he said, *Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.* That suits me. Good-night! And so interpret that, my beautiful."

He bowed low, holding her hand, kissed it, and was gone.

She sat long in silence, thinking deeply. Then from around her neck, pendant in a chain of massive gold, she drew forth a locket from her bosom, and from the way she kissed it, I knew it was the Teacher.

Then I saw her start and rise from the piano stool, for a man came boldly in, unannounced, from the door out of which the Governor had gone.

She arose very calmly, her face white to the lips, as the man, with all the assurance of old, bowed mockingly, saying:

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"Madame Nettles — ah, it 's been a long time since I saw you, my dear."

"I am sorry it has not been longer," she said, coming back with her old spirit at him. "I heard you were dead — had killed yourself drinking."

"O, no," he said; "on the contrary, I am more alive than ever; and for the first time in several years, being able to make a move in the world, I have come to claim you."

She was silent a while, thinking. Then, very firmly: "Now tell me what you wish, for our interview must be short."

He glanced at the beautiful woman before him, and his face took on some of the gallantry of old — her beauty, the splendor of her gown.

"I heard you sing to-night, Kitty. It was glorious."

"Thank you," she said, bowing with cold grace.

His face brightened. "You know I have always loved you, Kitty," he said, coming nearer, "and now that you really are my mock wife — all that trick the ceremony you played on us needed was the license —"

She stepped back, her eyes indignant. "Don't come any nearer," she said; "I will ring for the stage men. What do you want? Can't you see I am not the same person you once knew? — that you have used the gifts you had for debasement — I mine for the peak and the star?" she said proudly.

"Nonsense," said Nettles testily, "you were made for me from the beginning of time."

"It looks, indeed, as if you were sent to be the evil star of my existence," she said sadly — "but now —"

He faced her with all the nervy boldness of old: "You will recognize me as your husband — do you hear that? — or this town will not hold us both. It 's a fine scandal

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I can revive, and a great sensation it would be if I sued — as I shall — for all of these things — the personal property of my wife, which is mine, under the law. I 'll ruin you in this town — your name, your reputation, all — unless you let me go with you — as your husband, your manager — anything you wish to call it."

She turned pale at the thought of it. Then she came to him gently. "Please go now," she said, "I want to think over things."

"I am a gentleman yet, and will prove it by going, Kitty," he cried softly; "but you," he laughed, "you put those claims I have on you yourself, Madame Nettles."

"It was to save Milly May — it was no marriage in law — it was —"

"Ay; but some States differ in their law. Here, for instance, may be the lack of some little detail —"

She paled for an instant. "Go, please, I am not the Kitty you once knew. I am living now for my art alone. I shall live my life for it. Love once cruelly used me — left me — I shall not let him return."

"I want to go with you," said Nettles doggedly; "and I am going to claim you — you made it so."

She arose daringly. "You utterly deceive yourself."

He looked at her fiercely, the man-mastering spirit of old rising in the old way, for a moment, in the wreck of the man before her. "Your good sense has always been your saving, Kitty. Let it come to your aid now. You know it would mean your ruin socially if I acted. Will you make me do it? And listen: you would learn to love me — as your husband and manager — I 'd make you love me," he said.

She shrank back, white with anger. "Please go," she said, "and let me think."

"Listen," he went on boastingly, "don't think I am a

## The Gift of the Grass

pauper. After Saturday I 'll have money to burn," and he smiled assuredly. "Have n't you read the papers?" he asked. "Have n't you heard that I challenged my old enemy?"

She turned and was all interest. "No," she said, "I have not. I know nothing. As fast as steamer could take me I went abroad that next day (I had borrowed the money from Jack), after that terrible night, and there I — we — stayed and studied. This is my first week in New York — and — well — you know now I am heartsick that I did not stay there — away from a country that claims you — there is but one name for you," she said hotly.

"You may talk as you please," he flushed, "but you will wish you were in Germany again if you do not do as I say. Saturday —" and his old boasting way returned — "I will win the greatest race ever paced; I will reap the revenge of a lifetime. I will come here then for your final answer. You will go with me — or —"

She did not wait. Her beautiful gown flashed under the lights as she turned and left him.

Two men came instantly in and Nettles glowered for a moment at them, then turned and slouched out. As he did so, Reddy, his face livid with fighting anger, started towards the door to meet him. Then the old control came, that had won so often in the struggle of the race. He came back, but I saw the set purpose of a desperate resolve in his face.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### THE BATTLE IN THE BACKSTRETCH

Not, as in my first race, came I upon the track that Saturday afternoon to battle for my championship. Then I was unknown and unheralded; but now as I paced slowly up past the grand stand, it was as if I went between great walls of cheering partisans, a mass of faces eager for a sight of me and showing by their clamor that I was still the favorite.

It took five men to put the Man Eater into shafts. One used a stout twister on his nose; and when Nettles sprang into the sulky and settled with the lines in his hands, the great horse leaped straight up into the air, his driver rising in the sulky and holding to the shafts, now straight above his head, until the great brute came down only to repeat it again and again, springing by leaps and jumps through the gateway and on to the track.

And thus he went full half a mile, snorting and plunging, his great seventeen hands of muscle-hard flesh upon legs of steel, quivering with boasting rage.

His stride, when Nettles got him settled, was gigantic. As he passed, warming up, the wind in the wake of his body was like that of a great engine in full flight. I remember distinctly seeing Billy watching him and speaking not. And I knew that the instinct that had never failed him was strongly working for a solution.

Then, without a word, he went into the infield and watched the great horse with keen, quick eyes. Nor, save in the race itself, did he ever leave me, as if he would

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be by me in some great danger which only he, with his poetic ken, so clearly foresaw.

Mr. Raymond, who had put up the money for the match, stood with Reddy as he watched the Man Eater warming up, going the reverse way of the track. Reddy, whose trained, quick eyes saw so much in little, suddenly turned to him with: "I see his game now; but like all who fail, he forgets there is such a thing as a finish." And Mr. Raymond smiled blandly, as one who had never doubted.

I looked at Billy — he spoke not. Then went I into that race, for the first time in my life, in doubt, but resolved to die, if need be, in my last great effort.

There were to be but three heats — two being the winner's. For flesh and blood can stand but its limit of extreme speed. "T is the pace that kills," said the great bard of the Whites.

The wild, uncanny look in the Man Eater's eyes carried a vague meaning I had never seen in horse or man before; and the queer way he kept snorting a meaningless phrase (which to this day I have been unable to decipher) struck like cold sleet upon my nerves.

Defiantly and thunderingly it rolled, as he flashed lightly along, with the regularity of the beat of his great stride:

*"Hallabaloo — hoo! Me and the mad-dog's daughter!"*

I felt a touch, and Billy looked up into my face. Never had I seen so great and resigned a look in living face before. Nay, and I say it now, with the picture of it forever lingering in my memory — beautiful.

"I shall be with you, my friend — fear not. But go into the fight with the wisdom of the serpent and the courage of the lions of thy breed, for thou art not up against saneness and the steed of sense, but the untethered soul of the whirlwind broke loose."

## The Battle in the Backstretch

And I wear it now — the flower of pride — for it bloomed for me that day in the desperate fight of that race. And I prize it the more, that it bloomed only to the watered tears of sorrow.

For the Man Eater took the pole from my very teeth at the bolt from the starter's lips, and so quickly and furiously and with such a whirl of thunder-wind he went, that his *hallabaloo* — *hoo* was all I heard, as an echo, as he melted away before my sight like a great reefed ship, hurricane driven, into the black mists of the night.

I heard the grand stand groan. I saw the friends who had backed me hang along the rail limp, and with faces withered in a second's flash. I felt no touch from Reddy, though he was rating me faster than I had ever paced from the wire before. And when the Man Eater passed the first eighth, I heard Reddy's watch click, as he timed him, and then —

“Great God! — twelve seconds!” came from his set lips.

The next eighth seemed like an eon to me, for I could feel Reddy sitting tense and cruelly motionless, his eyes glued to the flying thing ahead, waiting to take his measure for the quarter. And I knew it as well as he — another eighth like that, or even near it, and nothing could save us. But if he flickered, ay —

“Fifteen, Hal — thank God!” came like the crack of an urging whip from Reddy's lips to my ears, and never before adown my lines came such an exulting, triumphant laugh. Reddy had laughed the first time in five years.

That difference in the two eighths meant he had shot his bolt at the wrong end.

Like all fools, who fail, he was taking toll of the finish to buy fireworks for the start.

Then I buckled to my work.

## The Gift of the Grass

It was a glorious sight, so said they all, the way we did it. Slowly, relentlessly, I came up to him, inch by inch, foot by foot, and then yard by yard. I saw first the rim of his sulky wheels fifty yards from the wire. And I heard first his jogging staccato stroke from legs I knew from their sound were now stilted, striking the earth hard, with a power that was dying. Their thundering patter that swept past me at the pole with the electrical snap of a battery in action now hit hollowly the ground in ever-lessening reverberations and as lifeless as dead bricks falling from a crumbling tower's wall. And be this my glory when I am dead and my epitaph is written — be this my glory and the glory of all who have dared to do and not died, that from our mother's womb came with us that nameless Tower that rears highest its head under its greatest burdens!

In fifty feet of the wire he died like a lifting sail in the Sea of Saragossa — barnacled — sapped, reeling in a stench of seaweeds.

He had paced the first quarter in twenty-seven seconds — the last in thirty-two.

And that told the whole story.

I, mine — and with pride I say it — ran thus: 31 — 30½ — 29 — 30. And a new world's record was made!

And then of glory and the frenzy of friends who had backed me, not in vain, had I my full share.

I shall never be able to fully tell of the horrors of that second heat, which was to be ours for the asking. I cannot explain their cruel fixing of me, for it had been planned by brains greater than mine. Paid accomplices of Nettles they were, who saw their money being burned before their eyes, because of their mistaken judgment of the Man Eater's powers. While Reddy, despite his protests, was being ridden in triumph on the shoulders of his

## The Battle in the Backstretch

joy-mad friends around the track, and George, drunk also with the glory of it and the whiskey Nettles had made him drink, it was done.

Two men had hid in the loft above me while the race was on and no one was there but the negro dwarf who never left my stable. They had seized, bound, and gagged him and thrown him into the loft on a pile of straw. Tying me across the stall, my head held fixed with thongs in both rings of the bit, as was common before rubbing me down, George, under the whiskey and the joy of seeing Reddy triumphant, had left me, when two hands seized my ears like a vise from above, an ounce of mercury was poured into my ears, and on it — packed cotton. In an instant it was done and they were gone.

Nor can I describe the agony of that effort with the deadening metal pressing on my brain. I fought like a demon to overcome it as we thundered after the Man Eater for the deciding heat. Then suddenly my limbs stiffened, a blackness came that shut out the light — the track — all. I felt Reddy's maddening grip as, taking it in, and seeing they had poisoned me, he hissed across the wheels to Nettles —

*“That’s your game, you coyote — but we’ll die here together!”*

And bowing like Samson, he bore his great weight on my off wheel, and blinded, frenzied, I shot, crashing like a great stone on the crest of an avalanche, into the horse and sulky beside me.

The brass tips of my sulky shafts went into the Man Eater’s chest, and so, linked and clinched, we turned over in the air shafts, spokes, and gearings, twisted and splintered beneath us.

I arose, bruised and dusty, but unhurt. The blow and fall had dislodged the metal and again my sight was mine.

## The Gift of the Grass

Some men were pulling Nettles from under the wreck. He was dead. Reddy had been thrown clear of the sulkies and over the low fence on the grass, and when they picked him up he smiled quietly and said:

"I am not hurt — only a bit shaken." He glanced at Nettles and added: "*We took equal chances and I left it to God!*"

But they understood him not, thinking him out of his head, and to this day it is told as a great accident on the track.

The Man Eater had arisen, shaking his broken harness from him as a great dog the rain drops. My own harness had been stripped from me. The two wrecked sulkies lay locked in a heap. I saw them carrying Reddy from the track, but Nettles lay dead where he fell — for none would touch him till the coroner came.

I was watching the Man Eater when he arose, for such queer guttural thunder never came before from horse's throat. The blood ran from the shaft thrust in his side, and his eyes were wild with blood, fury, and madness, and he stood loose, quivering with fury, untamed and unconquered — a wild beast, flung, unmuzzled, into the midst of men. And no man would go nigh him.

Suddenly, with blazing eyes and distended nostrils, he stalked over to where Nettles lay, and the crowd watched him, breathless, for never before had a horse acted as did this one. Slowly he smelt the dead master — the only being who had ever controlled him, the one he loved as the wild Centaur loved his mistress of the woods. With his great quivering nose he caressed the dead face. Vainly he tried to turn him over. Whinnying softly, he begged him to arise. Then he stared, silent, with gaunt, wild, panic-brooding eyes into eyes more gaunt, and staring, ghost-lighted, to the wan, unmeaning skies.

## The Battle in the Backstretch

Long he stood staring, his eyes to Nettles' eyes, his lips on the dead man's breast; then into his clouded, storm-gathering brain came the lightning flash that this meant death.

Then it was his fury broke, even as the storm in the mountains, and with a roar he charged the crowd. In an instant the track was cleared, men leaping the fence, no longer men, but monkeys of an earlier age, fleeing before the roar of the jungle tiger.

I alone stood before him — I and Billy, who, upon the fence nigh me, stood watching him with lightning eyes.

At sight of me his fury leaped into action.

*“Hallabaloo — hoo — you did it — you!”* he screamed demoniacally, and rising on his hind legs, with ears back and teeth glaring, he came at me like a fury driven bear, his great fore feet, steel shod, fanning the air, striking forward like great hammers — the deadliest weapons horse ever stood up before.

“Shoot him!” I heard men shout, and instantly there shot from the fence a hunchback with a pitchfork. Right into the demon's path he sprang, right under his uplifted legs, right into the teeth that could rend as could no grizzly of the mountains, and hurling himself at the brute, he plunged the pitchfork full into his breast. The next instant the skull of the hunchback flew from his head under his cap. One of the steel shod blows had caught him.

I arose to meet him and fight for my life. I struck out fiercely, but the next instant his great foot struck me a glancing blow on the tip of my poll and I went down helpless before him. He sprang back, rising again. And this time there was a gaunt, grim laughter mingled with the maniac's scream:

*“Hallabaloo — hoo — you did it — you!”*

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I saw him gathering his feet to spring on me and stamp my life out. I tried to rise, but for a moment I was helpless, and in that moment Billy acted. Like a steel sheathed bullet he shot down from the fence, and as the great brute arose to come down and rend me, two keen horns in a catapult-head plunged into his belly at the tenderest seat of his loins, where the great artery pulsed, and the Man Eater quivered for a moment and then came down, his lifeless hoofs rattling around the great dead hulk.

And under him died Billy, his horns still in the brute's bowels.

## CHAPTER XLV

### THE AUCTION

IN the month that Reddy was in the hospital he must have suffered greatly, both in mind and body. For his love for Sky-Eyes and Kitty was great, yet the heart within him was hot with grief and sorrow. And the death of Nettles was greatly on his mind, as much as he deserved the fate which befell him. For in his delirium they kept hearing him say:

*“I took the same chance, and left it to God.”*

Then came the news that, owing to Reddy's accident and that he could never drive again, I was to be sold at auction to the highest bidder.

Never did news bring more sorrow to my heart! I had heard others speak so often of the fate of harness race horses, that, however glorious may have been their past, however honestly and gamely they may have done their duty, bringing to their owners both fame and fortune — always their fate was the same — broken, they were still hacked about on half-mile tracks for the small purses they might win, beaten where once they were victors, and often, crippled and lame, sold even to butchers to haul their carts around.

But never had it occurred to me that anybody but Reddy would ever own me. Never had I thought of any fate, but that I, having won honorably his fortune and finished my career, should go back with him to the sweet

## The Gift of the Grass

blue grass hills of Tennessee, pensioned in my old age to live and rest upon the grass that had been the gift of my life.

No more would I see the purpling flush of the red-buds — spring's first brush upon the brown hills, the background of a picture she would finish with the year. Nor, later, the dogwoods starring the half-leaved forest, splashed white among the shadows of leaves; nor the locusts, swinging high their blossoming bells above. And in the open never again from my pasture hills would I look down on the great streams, running through the summer's meadows, where the field lark floated on parachute wing above the nestling younglings in the redtop. What to me was life and fame and glory — ay, the day's work — if in the shimmer of a July sun I could look not again as I rested 'neath the beeches on the blue grass hill, on the tented fields of the wheat men, bivouacked for their fight with the thresher? And when they had marched away, what picture more beautiful than summer would paint on the wide, pale canvas of her field of stubble, splashing it with the blue of trailing morning-glories, the yellow of clustering sorrel, the stars of the white anemone, the variegated glories of those colors — divinest of all — the great passion-flowers, each on a pavilion of rainbow rims, upholding clusters of yellow stars?

Oh, the pictures summer can paint on the straw canvas of a stubble field!

And autumn — not a painter truly, but a shepherdess — and she would lead her flocks there — the partridge people, in gowns brown and bedecked, and sporting rabbits that dearly loved a foot race, and field larks that were ever busy, and stately killdees that stalked about on stilted legs and, gossiping, meddled quietly.

And winter — I loved even the cotton canvas she threw

## The Auction

over it, when they had gone, to keep it unsullied for the coming year.

And the hills — always beautiful — was I never to live with them again?

I could not help it — great tears stood in my eyes. The Tennessee Demon, who had broken the hearts of so many in the backstretch, was a weakling in the sorrow that this separation meant.

“Your finish is plain,” they said to me; and, having beaten them, I could see that they joyed in the doom they knew was mine. “Now it will be this way, Hal: flesh and blood can’t stand much longer your clip. Beaten you will be, as sure as younger ones continue to come with the fire of youth in their veins and its strength in their hearts. Year after year they will race you until, broken, spavined, you can race no longer; and so to the cart of the butcher, the baker, or the candlestick maker — it matters not. If perchance you break down earlier, you get there the quicker.”

Many horsemen came to look me over, and I heard them guessing what I would bring. And one was a large man — beef-necked and low-browed — and I heard him nudge another who was his partner and say: “We’ll bid ten thousand, Jim; there’s three more years of hard work in him yet, and then the half-mile tracks and the country shows.”

It was pathetic and intensely interesting to me, that auction. It was held in a great building in the centre of a ring, around which sat or stood thousands of people, and in a little stand stood the loud-voiced auctioneer, proclaiming so brazenly the greatness of every good, bad, and worthless horse that was led out before his hammer, that I wondered what he could have left to say for me.

But it was not he who said it; it was Reddy, on crutches,

## The Gift of the Grass

and at sight of him in the stand by the auctioneer, the great crowd broke into applause, ladies standing and waving their handkerchiefs, until it looked as if they would never cease.

There were tears in his eyes as he told them my story. "And it's not that I would sell him, gentlemen," he said, "but, crippled, I know not if I can ever drive him again."

"Who will start him?" cried the auctioneer — "the great pacing champion of the world? Who will bid twenty thousand, ten thousand, five thousand —"

A hand went quickly up, and my heart sank within me. The bid came from the beef-necked gambler who meant to buy me for the last dollar that was in me and race me to a finish — as long as I could stand.

"I am offered five thousand," cried the auctioneer, "who will make it six?"

"I," and to my great relief, Mr. Raymond's hand went up, while his sweet wife who stood by his side, smiled reassuringly at me.

"Seven," came quickly from the gambler.

"Eight," smiled back Mr. Raymond.

"Nine!"

"Ten!"

"Eleven!"

"Twelve!"

It ceased, the gambler coming over with his partner and looking me cold-bloodedly over, while the auctioneer pleaded and cried for a raise, and told of my greatness and the money that was yet to be made from me.

"Twelve thousand — I am offered twelve thousand — it's against you, sir," cried the auctioneer, smiling entreatingly at the gambler.

"Fifteen," cried the latter quickly, and I saw Mr. Raymond's smile die out on his face.

## The Auction

"I was bidding for sentiment alone," he said — "and for the speedway, for myself. I cannot go more. I do not want to race him."

Mr. Raymond had turned, and though the auctioneer called again and again, there came no response. I saw the cold, dull face of the gambler light dimly up with pride. I saw others of his kind whispering and nodding to him, when suddenly as the auctioneer called for the last time, there arose in the highest tier of the amphitheatre a woman so queenly beautiful that the auctioneer stopped midway in his call, and the audience turned and gazed with him. The rich silk gown gleamed in the light, her great brown eyes shone with the lighted fire of doing, and I saw again, Kitty amid the green corn, backgrounded against the blue Tennessee hills.

"Twenty thousand," she said quietly, and the voice came so silvery and sweet that once again I heard the mocking bird in the lilac bush.

The auctioneer stood for a moment, looking sillily at her. The gambler reddened, bit his lip, then turned and spoke to the auctioneer.

"Madame," said the latter, "pardon me, but you are a lady, you know — and — pardon me — but that is a large amount, and — pardon, Madame, but the rules — you are a woman, you know — would you give — would you name personal security, you know — some one —"

Kitty smiled graciously, then very quietly took from her neck, hidden beneath her gown, a diamond brooch of such splendor that as she stood smiling and offering it to the man, he gazed for a moment queerly at her and then said, his gallantry returning in a burst:

"Keep it, Madame — pardon me — but — I am satisfied. Twenty thousand — twenty — going —" he stopped, looking for the gambler.

## The Gift of the Grass

A laugh came from the crowd when the wave of it showed the gambler had quit and gone.

Again and again came the auctioneer's cry — and then, "Gone — sold for twenty thousand!" he cried, bringing down his hammer, and I felt the great glory of the conquering backstretch surge again in my heart.

"What name?" he asked.

"Mlle. Katherine," she smiled.

"Oh!" cried the auctioneer, reddening in apology, while the crowd applauded, cheering.

All beautiful she came forward, straight up to me. Then in the old way her arms went round my neck, as she said: "My little Hal, unbeaten you have lived — unbeaten shall you die! We are going home, Hal — back to Tennessee." Then she turned, and Reddy, trying to rise, was caught in her arms, while he, the strong one, wept on her shoulder.

"I heard of it all only yesterday," she said. "We are going home, Reddy — home. See, here is Sky-Eyes; she wants to kiss you, too."

Sky-Eyes started across to him, but stopped, turned crimson, and Reddy, straightening up, held out his hands — and fainted where he sat. Then Sky-Eyes' color went and, forgetting all else, she had his head in her lap and bent low her beautiful head, whispering: "Buddy — Buddy, it is I — Sky-Eyes!"

Reddy arose, clinging to his crutch and holding her hand, with silent tears in his eyes, when a stranger thing happened.

"Are you all right, Reddy?" said Mr. Raymond, his eyes fixed on the girl who stood by Reddy, calling him brother and blushing by turns.

Then quickly died the blush on her face, and, dropping

## The Auction

Reddy's hand, she held out her arms helplessly towards Mr. Raymond, saying:

“Father! father!”

But already the mother was in her arms, for there is naught that surpasses the mother instinct of her own.

Ay, proud and happy was I that night!

## CHAPTER XLVI

### “OH, BERRIES IN THOSE HOLLY-WREATHS ”

THAT happy day when we left for home again!

For Reddy, in his new happiness that had come to him, had abandoned his crutch, in the months that followed the auction; and Sky-Eyes, in the newly found love of father and mother, was the happiest of beautiful beings. And this is the way Reddy found out how greatly Sky-Eyes loved him:

It was the week before we left for home, and they sat, Reddy and Sky-Eyes, in the sitting room of the great house of the Raymonds.

“It is all fine about our going home,” said Reddy, “Kitty and I — and the great home she is going to build, and I, henceforth, to realize the dream of my life — the owning of a stock farm in Tennessee — but —” and he ceased speaking, looking at Sky-Eyes in deep thought.

“You will laugh,” he said after a while, “at what is worrying me.”

“Why, it’s leaving me,” said Sky-Eyes, innocently; “is n’t it, Buddy?”

“Of course,” said Reddy — “that and — well — I hate to tear down the little cabin we lived in so happily — and to put up a big house in its place.”

“Oh, you must n’t do that — tear it down —” she said, clasping her hand over his in a sisterly way.

“Why?” he asked, looking closely at her.

“Why, because — because — why, it’s because we lived there and were happy there. And do you know,”

## “Oh, Berries in those Holly-Wreaths”

she went on, “that in all our travels around and our hard work and our triumphs (for I still call Kitty’s mine),” she laughed, “I have seen so much that was not happiness, so much that was make-believe — that I have said that any home, however humble, in which people were really happy — as you and I and Kitty were — ought to remain as a monument to happiness in a world of unrest. It was the first real home I had; please don’t destroy it, for I shall want to go there every year to see it — to see you and Kitty.”

Reddy, shrewd in the ways of his kind as he had been great in battles, said indifferently:

“I feel just that way — but — well, little sister, the truth is, I am going to marry, and I think my wife will want a larger home —”

The hand that was on his slipped off. She sat up straight — and the pretty light went out of her eyes.

“I am so glad,” she said after a while. “I am sure I shall love her — as a sister.”

“You see, years ago,” went on Reddy, trying to take her hand (but the hand would not be taken), “you see, years ago, Sky-Eyes, I loved a little girl down in Tennessee, and we became great friends. And I saw that if I ever lived to be worthy of her and make money enough to support her in the way she had been reared, I’d marry her if she loved me still.”

But Sky-Eyes was silent.

“And I think she does — ‘in fact, I know it,’ he said, “and so I am going to marry her.”

Here Sky-Eyes burst into tears. And the next minute Reddy had her in his arms, struggling, while he, kissing her, cried: “It is you, darling, darling — Can’t you see — don’t you know I have loved you since that ride home — little waif that you were — on the colt that the Captain

## The Gift of the Grass

gave me? Then — even then, I loved you. And when I found you had gone — ” he ceased, for his own strong voice shook with sweet and bitter memories. Which, seeing, Sky-Eyes kissed him; and so they sat, happy, in the old, old way, sister and brother now no longer — but lovers.

A year had passed, and again I saw the spring break in the flush of red-buds among the hills. And summer once more had painted her stubble's canvas in the old glory of ever-recurring colors. And autumn, with her ripening wand, had followed, and the meadow lark had made wise her grown nestlings in the ways of their kind. And again winter had fallen splendid amid the hills. And now the red glory of the holly gleamed above the snow around the little schoolhouse.

It was Christmas night. Slipping from her guests, the lover-governor (who had come so far to be with her again), and from her friends, a room full of brilliant people who had come to spend the first Christmas with her in her own home, amid the great trees of Tennessee, Kitty came as of old to my stall. She was wrapped in white furs, her dark eyes shining out from among them like memories of a Madonna among the white clouds. In a moment her saddle was tossed on me and she sent me in the old daring way bowling across the snow.

In the little room at the schoolhouse stood the little organ, as it stood of old. And here in the room, lit only by the starlight, as full of memories as her own heart of sorrow and love unforgotten, she seated herself at the organ, and the mocking bird, waked from his slumber, wondered dreamily what mate of his had fallen into the old trapped walls of man. For she, who had sung before kings and held listeners enthralled from pit to dome

## “Oh, Berries in those Holly-Wreaths”

poured out the words of a song of her own making, 'till the little building rocked 'like a paper house in the glory of it:

“Around my garland'd hall of years hang holly wreaths to-night,  
And faintly through the mist and tears come music and the light;  
I see again each Christmas-tide, I smell the incense sweet,  
I hear the voices that have passed adown the Unseen Street.  
Each wreath stands out an immortelle, a crown with purest gem  
Of berry bright — (peace — peace — 't is His, the Child of Bethlehem).

“Oh, Christmas, you have come again with fuller meaning yet,  
And deeper truths, oh, heart of mine — oh, eyes, why are ye wet?  
For carols into minors turned, for withered wreaths once bright,  
For voices which ye long for that ceased singing in a night?  
Oh, holly wreaths, ye're crowns for Him (peace — peace — 't is mine  
— the years)  
Oh, berries in those holly wreaths — Oh, rosary of tears! ”

She heard not the Teacher come into the room and stand silent with a joy that shook him in the sweet glory of a great dream realized. And not till she had finished did she see him; and then, realizing that to him had fallen the travail of years, a love hopeless but unchanged, and that like her he had travelled far to stand mute though unrewarded at its shrine, overpowered with its fulness and completeness, she bowed her head in her arms at the old desk, in the old way, weeping.

And in the old way he came forward, taking her in his arms, the sob of her dying into a smothered, happy sigh, beneath his lips.

Thus dreamed I in the old home, my summers spent on the very grass of my youth, amid the shade of the mighty trees where I had loved, with my mother, to doze away the summer days. And many were the visitors who

## The Gift of the Grass

came miles to see me, the famous horse who held for ten years the record of the track. Kitty herself, a great lady, tall and most beautiful, drove me often to a light phaeton, and in it were her own comely children happy in the love of a mother so beautiful and good. And Reddy's little boy, so very much as his own sire used to be that he early took first affection in my heart, used daily to bring me apples and lumps of snowy sugar.

My good mother and father had passed away, but my brother, a most handsome brown stallion, named Brown Hal, lived near me, and he, too, now held the stallion record in a race and was champion of his class.

Then one day was my cup filled to overflowing; for Reddy came with a telegram in his hand, a great smile on his lips. "Congratulations, old boy," he said. "Hurrah for Star Pointer! he has broken all records! He is the first horse to go a mile in two minutes!"

Star Pointer, the son of my brother, Brown Hal!

Then tears came to my eyes and my heart swelled, that my old sire had passed, and lived not to see his prophecy fulfilled. And then repeated I to myself the words of the last note he had written me before he died. Then I had understood it not, now so plainly his meaning came:

*"Point to the stars, my son, and let thy feet go ever onward. For whatsoever shall be the dream of thy heart, that shalt thou one day be. And whatsoever shall be thy faith on this earth, that shall be thy life in the world to come."*

"Bok, Bok, I thank thee," I said, with mist in my eyes. "Now hath the dream of my sire come true; the religion of my mother has become a reality."

THE END









